gamesTM

PS3 / Xbox 360 / Wii / PS2 / GC / Xbox / PC / GBA / PSP / DS / Arcade / Retro

Interview
JACK THOMPSON
"I'm not a perfect man"

Previewed
MASS EFFECT
BioWare's new RPG

Brothers In Arms: HELL'S HIGHWAY

Ubisoft's all-out
assault on next-gen

PREY EXCLUSIVE
2K'S BOLD NEW FPS REVIEWED INSIDE

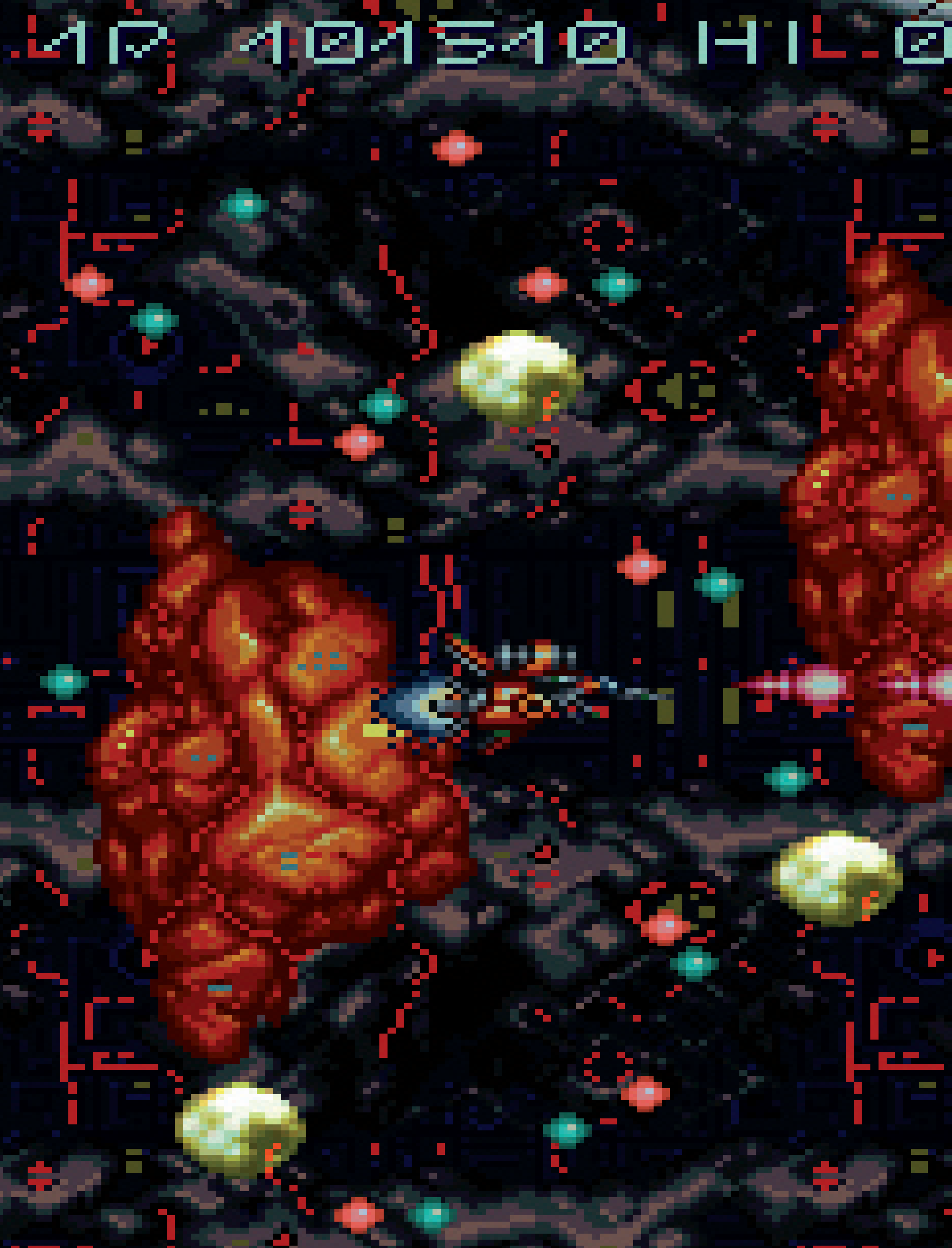
Highlights
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS (DS)
SHADOWRUN (MULTI) SUPER PAPER MARIO (GC) GETAWAY (PS3)
C&C: TIBERIAN WARS (PC) SONIC (MULTI) S.T.A.L.K.E.R. (PC)
INDIANA JONES 2007 (MULTI) GOD HAND (PS2) TOO HUMAN (360)

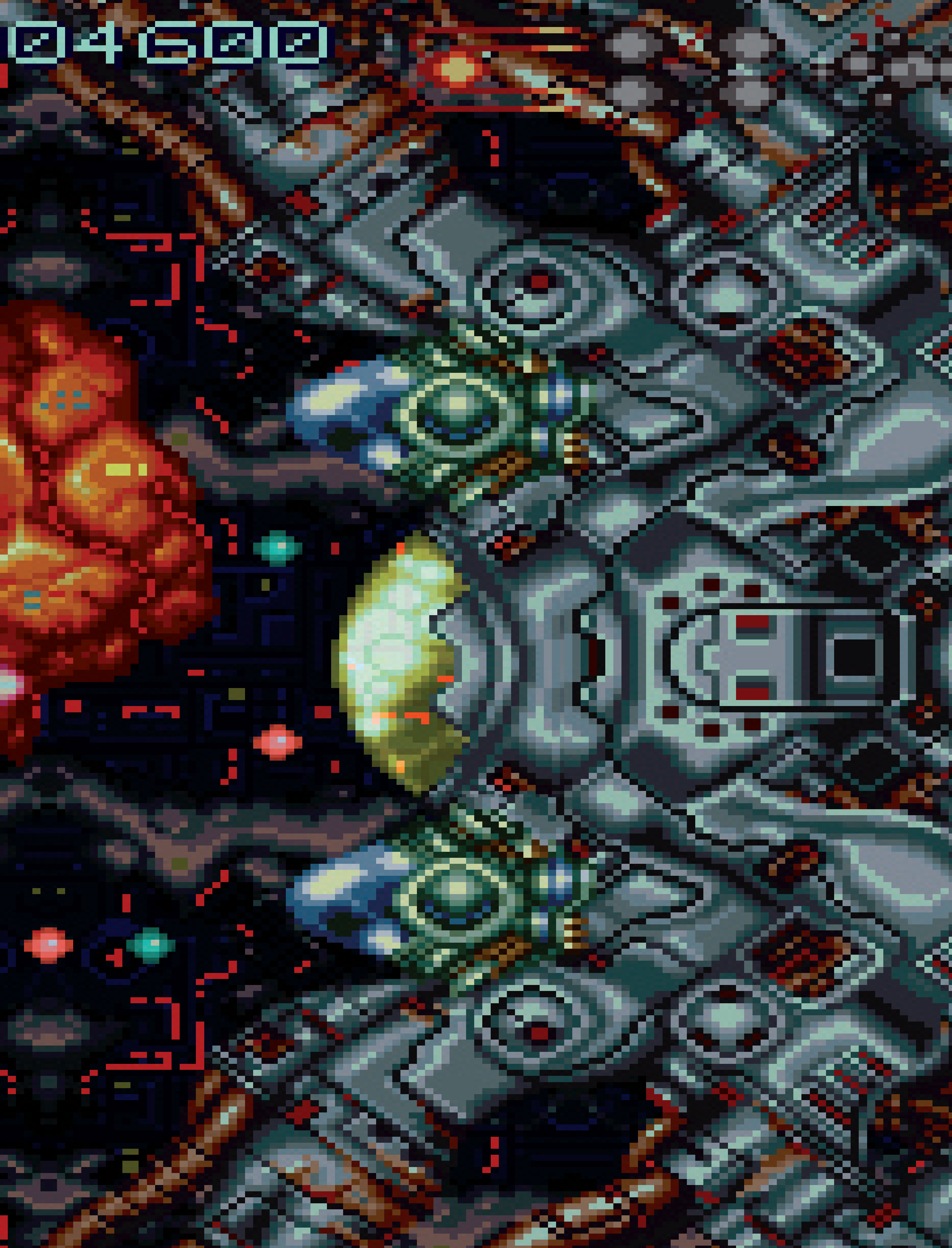

eMag

Violence… However we look at it, shun it or embrace it, it's a part of life, a part of human nature, and a part of entertainment – be it on the silver screen or in the videogames we play. This month in particular has reminded me of just how much violence there is in the mediums we rely upon for amusement, and how much of it there is in this issue. From watching television programmes like *24* and movies such as *The Godfather* to playing videogames like *Prey* – violence is integral to the telling of a great many stories and, let's face it, without it we wouldn't be so compelled to watch or play. While violence is not a necessity to either medium – I'd happily race around a track or kick a ball – I couldn't imagine playing a videogame without some sense of impending punishment. Be it on the battlefields of *Brothers In Arms*, in the beat-'em-up arenas of *Street Fighter* or within the warped fantasy of *Prey*, I welcome the opportunity to inflict as much pain and damage as my sniper rifle, Dragon Punch or spirit walk will allow… after all, it's just a game. While America's very own Mary Whitehouse, Jack Thompson, may often go about things the wrong way, I do agree with many of his principles. But ultimately I trust in my own moral compass to distinguish between reality and the virtual world I love. I hope you do too. Enjoy the issue…

Paul Morgan
Editor




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HI


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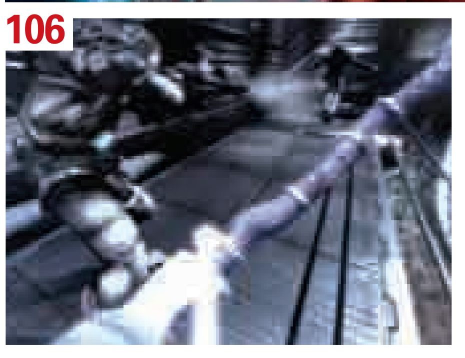
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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS



LITE LAUNCH

DS LITE FINALLY ARRIVES, BUT NINTENDO'S LAUNCH STRATEGY SEEMS STRANGE…

It's been a while since we heard about – and saw – the stylish charms of DS Lite for the first time, but it's finally made it over to our shores.

The machine's 'iPod-generation' style overhaul has already proved its worth across the rest of the globe with over 2 million units being shifted in Japan earlier this year and 136,500 units being snapped up by the US market in just two days when the handheld launched back in June.

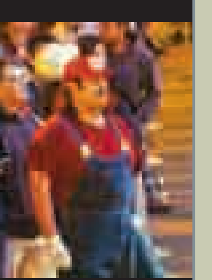
In some ways it's a surprise that DS Lite holds such appeal. As many are pointing out, this is really little more than a cosmetic enhancement, and for people to be buying at this level Nintendo must be doing something right when it comes to marketing its latest piece of kit to the territories in question – something that also seems to be the case for us here in Europe.

Nintendo is supporting the launch of the console with a £2.5 million marketing campaign in the UK alone, but the strange thing is that the company seems to be focusing more on the new titles available rather than the hardware itself. Games such as *Nintendogs Dalmatian*, *New Super Mario Bros* and *Brain Training* have all featured on television adverts recently; but while the titles were all played on DS Lite, the actual machine itself received no mention at all. Still, it's probably going to work wonders when it comes to baiting gamers into a purchase. We don't understand why, but it probably will.

Of course, the very stylish, we're-all-very-good-looking photographs used on this very page are also being used to boost the appeal of DS Lite. We're not going to comment on them, though, that would be too easy.



The Japanese queuing for their DS Lites in the time-honoured fashion – sleeping bags and all.



This man, predictably enough, was at the head of the queue. A more sinister Mario we never did see.



Here's another picture of a ridiculous American Nintendo fan queuing up on 11 June. Oh, to have that sort of enthusiasm.

LAUNCH TALES

DS LITE LAUNCH STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

FRONT OF THE QUEUE

Anyone remember the Japanese launch of the original DS? It was a little bit depressing – eclipsed by Sony's PSP launch. Oh, how the times have changed. DS Lite attracted queues of up to 400 people at several prominent early-morning openings throughout Tokyo back in March, with many retailers having to put 'Sold Out' signs up in their windows before the stores had even reached their normal morning opening hours. More significant than Lite's incredible launch sales figures, though, which are detailed in the main story, was the diversity of the crowd that the handheld launch attracted – there was a far greater female and elderly presence in the launch queues than at any other launch in history. Interesting…

THOSE CRAZY YANKS

Our dear American cousins were out in droves for the US launch of DS Lite on 11 June, and we thought we'd dedicate a little space to those people who were queuing outside the Nintendo World store in New York for more than a day in order to ensure their purchase. The first one hundred fans were gifted a carrying case and a free copy of *Brain Training*, and it seems that a distressing number were actually dressed up as Nintendo characters. We're talking grown men here, not adorable little kids sporting green tunics and little cardboard swords. You'd probably be arrested if you turned up outside the Oxford Street Game store sporting dungarees and a Mario moustache.

BRIT OF BOTHER

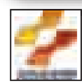
Of course, the UK launch of DS Lite did not go without a hitch – a substantial shipment of white DS Lite units, destined for the UK, was stolen in Hong Kong ahead of the launch. There is still no official confirmation of the numbers involved, but some rumours put the value of the shipment at over £1 million (approximately 12,000 DS Lites). Nintendo did confirm the theft, but since then the company has been entirely silent about the issue, suggesting that it did not consider it an insurmountable setback. There's no indication yet as to whether the theft has affected Nintendo's ability to supply the demand for the handheld in the UK.

"On the cover of issue 44 we included a logo, without permission, that had been designed by Milford Coppock, art editor of Future Publishing's PlayStation magazine PSM2, originally published in the April 2003 edition of PSM2. games™ would like to apologise to both Future Publishing and Mr Coppock for the use of the logo without permission."

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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



CASHING IN

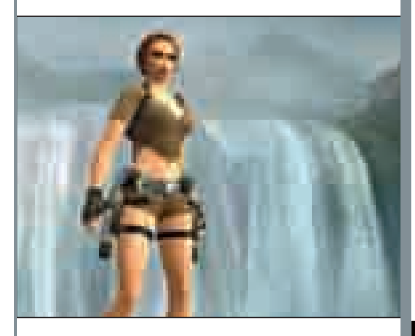
Konami reveals that Brazilian striker Leite Ribeiro Adriano will be representing *Pro Evo 6*. The Inter Milan forward, who sports well-manicured, Craig David-esque facial hair, will feature on the front cover when the game is released for PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox and 360 this autumn. Adriano seems delighted, no doubt due to the size of the cheque in his back pocket. "I am really looking forward to working with Konami on what everyone knows to be the most realistic game around," Adriano's agent told him to say.



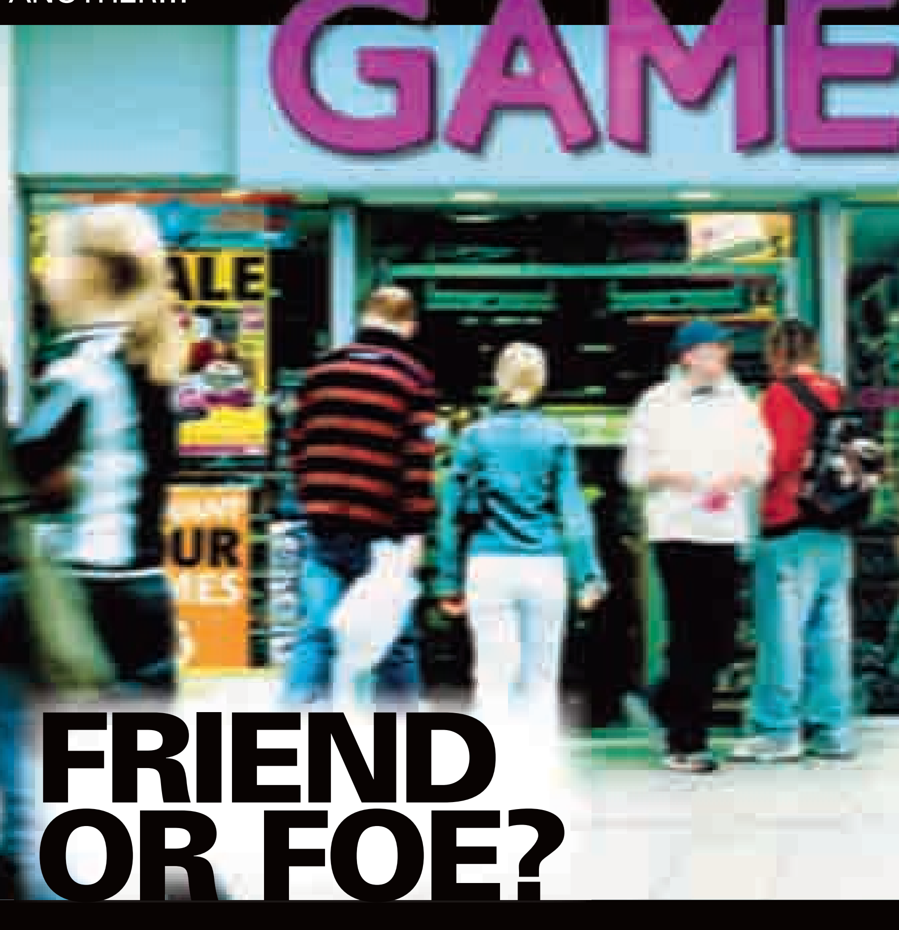


LARA REDUX

A remake of the original *Tomb Raider* is confirmed despite Core Design's denial of the project. After a video of the game was leaked onto the net, Core said, "The video was an internal presentation of a game that was being developed. However, following a recent review the project has been officially cancelled." Eidos, however, released an official statement saying that Crystal Dynamics, the team behind *TR: Legend*, will be releasing the game on PC, PS2 and PSP.







FRIEND OR FOE?

DOES THE SECOND-HAND GAME MARKET HERALD THE COLLAPSE OF THE INDUSTRY?

PlayStation3 has been the focal point for so much speculation that it has become hard to keep up with the truth. One rumour in particular has sparked debate in the industry regarding the sale of second-hand games. GamesRadar suggested that by selling the consumer a licence to the game rather than the physical property itself, Sony was trying to make it illegal to sell used software for its new console. The concept is legally unworkable, but it bears a striking resemblance to a similarly bottomless accusation last November that claimed Sony was designing its software so that it couldn't be played on more than one PlayStation3.

Sony has dismissed both rumours as false, but their existence speaks volumes for the industry's increasing concern over the booming second-hand market. Speaking at the ELSPA Games Summit, market analyst Nick Parker warned of an imminent explosion for used games in Europe, where free-market laws protect the right of the consumer to re-sell their property without interference. Parker also suggested that it would be the retailers' increasing promotion of trade-in offers – often occupying as much in-store space as new releases – that would facilitate the boom. With mark-ups hovering around 35-55 per cent, the benefits for retail companies are obvious, but publishers and developers receive no cut of the resale price and are afraid that consumers are waiting for games to be traded in to capitalise on the reduced price. It is difficult to find much sympathy for companies the size of Sony over decreased profits, but smaller publishers and developers could be profoundly affected should the sales of first-run games continue to drop.



■ Rumours surrounding PlayStation3 titles being bound to one machine proved false.

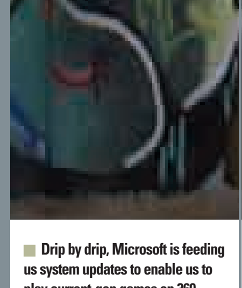


■ Companies like EA, with its massive catalogue of sports titles, load the market with products and lead people into seeking a bargain.



But is this the crux of the issue? It does seem strange that companies like EA and Ubisoft are criticising retail companies for making new products seem worthless when Game suffered an 80 per cent profit slump last year, citing falling software prices due to the current/next-generation transition as the primary cause. In an interview with *MCV*, Simon Boyd, head game buyer at Tesco, said, "It is unrealistic for publishers to expect older formats to still hold the same value to the customer as two or three years ago". Indeed, the boost in used game sales could be directly linked to consumers' receding interest in the current generation. With the industry constantly rhapsodising on the superiority of new technology, the public is now aware that the current gen is dead, so why pay full price while waiting for the next one to arrive?

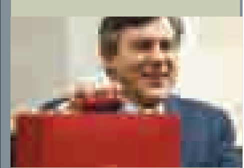
The possible ramifications might not be as terrible as they first appear. Cheap and widely available games mean that many who would never have invested in a console have done just that. Publishers may see no cut of the profits, but the trend is making more people play and thus driving the popularity of the mass market. Big releases and games of quality still sell in large numbers, but the market is so loaded with inferior products – an example being EA's tendency to release minutely different versions of its sports franchises year after year – that people are forced over to the bargain bins to save money. Indeed, an extreme upshot of all this might be that game production is streamlined, shifting the emphasis away from saturating the shops with mediocre titles and more toward making the games that are released of higher quality. However, once Nintendo Wii and PlayStation3 arrive and the next generation has captured the imaginations of gamers once again, we half expect the whole debate to evaporate as suddenly as it arrived.



Drip by drip, Microsoft is feeding us system updates to enable us to play current-gen games on 360.

SECOND STRIKE

Industry concerns amount to little more than hot air, but the general increase in private trading has also sparked the interest of The Treasury. VAT exemption laws were introduced to promote the free market, but the rise of companies like eBay has resulted in enormous amounts of untaxable money changing hands each year, and the government is already likely to be looking for ways to make it tax liable. The selling of used items in high-street stores would possibly be included in such a move. Fear not the wrath of Sony; fear the Chancellor of the Exchequer.



NOT ANOTHER...

XBOX 360 BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY UPDATE

WHICH HANDFUL OF CURIOSITIES IS IT THIS WEEK?

Will Microsoft ever escape the shadow of the mistakes it made with Xbox 360. After weeks and weeks of coverage on the fallout of its botched launch, the games press seems to be fixating on Peter Moore's mythical quest for backwards compatibility to fill the gap until Sony and Nintendo join the party.

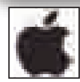
For the three people who don't know, Microsoft drastically underestimated its customer base's desire to keep playing their Xbox games – more than likely because the necessary changes would have delayed the launch of Xbox 360 by months. Since the two consoles run on radically different hardware, current-gen games weren't compatible, but after a large outcry Microsoft has started to drip feed system updates through Xbox Live that will allow you to play all your old favourites. After all, what would life be without online battles on *Halo 2*? Luckily for us, Microsoft has handled it all rather splendidly with the numbers of compatible games rising regularly and rapidly.

The problem is, of course, that this 'drip feed' method means that there's always some fairly meaningless piece of information leaking into the public eye. The fact that a large number of people took the initial slight so badly that they are intent on ironing out every little uncertainty only exacerbates the matter. Either way, we are only too happy to announce that Microsoft has increased the number of compatible games from 206 to 227. That's a staggering increase of 21 games, including such classics as *Bad Boys 2*, *Spawn: Armageddon* and *State Of Emergency*. Happy now? No, neither are we.

DATA STREAM

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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



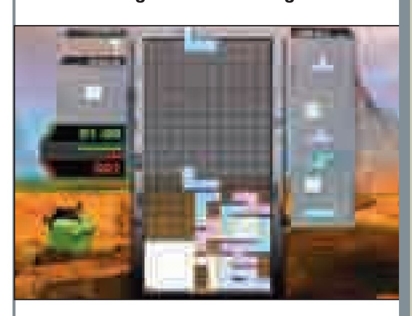
iGAMES

According to a story on GameSpot, it seems that Apple may be secretly setting up a game development division, the US site received a tip off from a 'tech-sector recruiter'. We're not talking a PSP or Xbox rival here, it seems more likely that the firm will be looking into providing casual games for download via its iTunes service, playable on Macs or perhaps other Apple devices such as iPods. Given that Apple is increasingly positioning its products as entertainment and lifestyle devices, though, an Apple gaming platform may not be too far off.



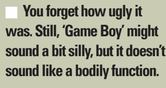
200 LINE BONUS

THQ has won its long-running legal battle with The Tetris Company, allowing it to release an Xbox 360 version of classic puzzle title *Tetris* later this year. It seems likely to us that it will be digitally distributed via Xbox Live Arcade, although there is a possibility that THQ will try to release it as a full product. How, though, could the publisher possibly justify a full price-point for a ten-year-old game on a next-gen system? How will it be updated for the modern audience? We think some sort of incredible *'Space Tetris'* might be forthcoming.

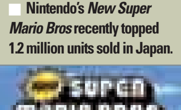




You forget how ugly it was. Still, 'Game Boy' might sound a bit silly, but it doesn't sound like a bodily function.



Nintendo's *New Super Mario Bros* recently topped 1.2 million units sold in Japan.





He won't be smiling so proudly when his new baby loses his company millions.

This is the Virtual Console interface as shown at E3 – nice and clean, very attractive, but by no means final.



NINTENDO GOES IT ALONE

IWATA REVEALS NEW INSIGHTS AT TOKYO PRESS CONFERENCE

Few important announcements were made at the Nintendo press briefing in Tokyo this month, although there has been plenty of comment surrounding Satoru Iwata's address. He began by defending the renaming of Nintendo's forthcoming Wii console – a move that caused widespread hilarity when announced, and even made it into *Private Eye's* Pseuds Corner this month. "I have never thought the name was a mistake," he claimed. "Some people seem to have a problem with it now, but I think they'll grow to like it." Iwata compared the tumult to Game Boy's nomenclature which was met with criticism for being exclusivist. Iwata is hoping that, as with Game Boy, Wii will also catch on, name and all.

Iwata seemed apparently unconcerned about the launch of PS3 and the possibility that it would be released within a few weeks of Wii. Nintendo is expecting to turn a healthy profit the year of release, unlike Sony and Microsoft, both of whom forecast losses due to the research and development costs of their new machines. "It is a strange notion that a game console always leads to mounting losses in the beginning," stated Iwata. "We can't promise we won't have even a one-yen loss, but we are not expecting an enormous loss… We are working to make the Wii business a healthy one from the first year." This highlights the massive difference between Nintendo's strategy and the more conventional approaches of Sony and Microsoft – for a console to be profitable in its very first year is almost unheard of, and would mean both extraordinarily low development and manufacturing costs combined with strong sales.



Indeed, Nintendo forecasts a growth of 22 per cent in its profits for the next year, although that probably has more to do with the DS success story than with expectations for Wii. In contrast, Sony expects to lose €691 million in the year following PS3's launch.

In other Iwata news this month, the man spoke out in a Japanese newspaper about the potential of Wii's Virtual Console feature – kept largely under wraps thus far – and its ability to bring little-known low-budget titles broader availability and become home to new titles as well as older SNES, NES and N64-era games – much like Live Arcade is now being used. Digital distribution, of course, is a very profitable way of doing business; perhaps such endeavours will form a substantial part of Nintendo's plan to stay in profit through the next-gen transition.



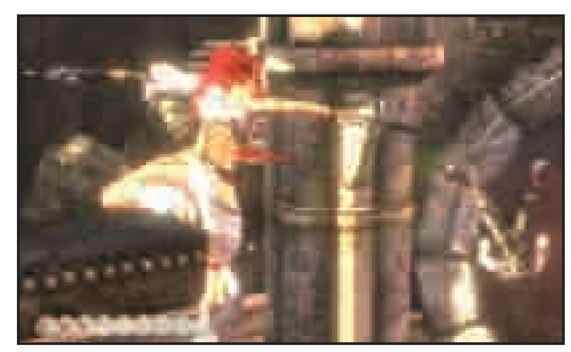
TROUBLED WATERS

RIDICULOUS RUMOURS SPARKED BY ANTI SONY SENTIMENT

More negative press darkened Sony's door this month, as US website Games Radar claimed that Sony was having difficulty physically fitting all of PlayStation3's components into the console's casing. It was also suggested that the Cell processor may run at a lower spec than had originally been reported.

Sony was extremely quick to deny these claims, as Sony spokesman Jonathan Fargher explains, "The PS3 downgrade story is categorically not true. Developers have been working with PS3 dev kits for anywhere between eight and 12 months, and to suggest that we'd now take the decision to downgrade the hardware at such a late stage is, well, ridiculous". This comes as no real surprise, but is nevertheless indicative of the current industry climate toward Sony. The announcement of the £425 price point has aggravated many journalists and consumers alike, and this type of rumour is a natural result of such an air of resentment.

While we don't dispute PS3's power or potential, there's a tangible difference between the pre-PS2 hype and the negative press that surrounds its successor. There's a serious chance that Sony has priced itself out of the market, and that would spell disaster. With Xbox 360 continuing to impress and Nintendo Wii turning heads at every opportunity, the PS3 launch is going to have to be something quite special in order to make the impact Sony undoubtedly desires.



Heavenly Sword will categorically NOT be running on an underpowered PlayStation3.

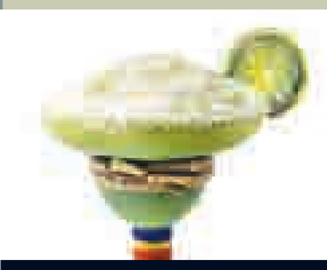
games™ THE TOP FIVE

SUMMER FUN



No.5 JAZZY JEFF & THE FRESH PRINCE

Find us a better summer anthem.



No.4 ULTIMATE FRISBEE

The sport of kings.



No.3 ULTIMATE MARGARITAS

Thanks, E3!



No.2 THE DS LITE

You can see the screen outside!

No.1 THE WORLD CUP

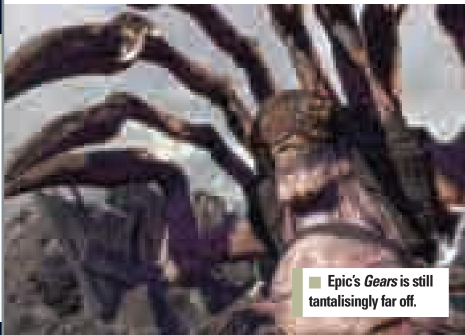
Does life get any better?



GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO. 46: IN BETWEEN GENERATION LIMBO

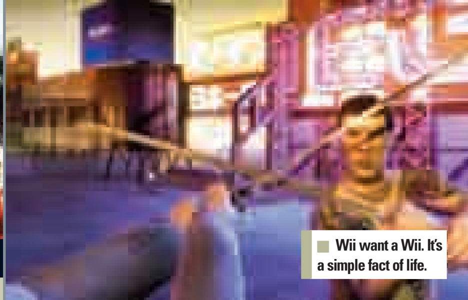


Epic's *Gears* is still tantalisingly far off.

As the summer gaming drought continues its annual assault on our boredom glands, we find ourselves even more frustrated than usual. E3 has passed, and we've been given a glimpse of the future. Of *Gears Of War*, of *Heavenly Sword*, of *Mario Galaxy*… and we can't play them – yet. It's the classic carrot and stick scenario, except we're fully aware that this particularly juicy looking carrot won't be ripe until the end of the year.

So we're left in limbo. Sure, there are plenty of other wonderful summer activities to keep us occupied, but this is Britain, and the summer's about as reliable as a Virgin train. Too many days and evenings will be spent fuddling about on Xbox Live Arcade or squeezing the last remaining drops out of *Okami* as the rain pelts against our firmly shut windows.

It happens with the passing of every generation. However, Xbox 360's incredibly premature arrival has made the predicament especially hard to bear. We've seen the future, hell, we've even felt the future, but now we can't HAVE the future until Christmas. That spells months of languishing with substandard PlayStation2 titles to come, then…

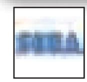


Wii want a Wii. It's a simple fact of life.

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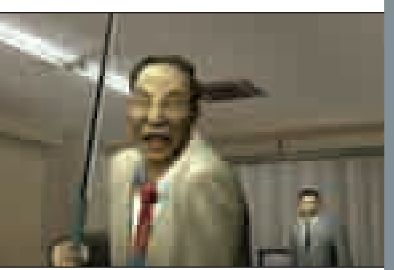
DOWNLOADING... 60%

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



STAR POWER

Japanese hit *Yakuza* is being re-dubbed for its Western release in September, for which Sega has assembled an 'all-star cast'. The rag-tag group of has-beens and never-will-bes includes the star wattage of Michael Madsen (*Free Willy*), Rachel Leigh Cook (*She's All That*), and Mark Hamill (*Flash 2: Revenge Of The Trickster*). Sega VP of marketing Scott Steinberg claims that, "*Yakuza* was an immense hit in Japan, and in bringing the game to the Western market we wanted to ensure that subtle nuances of the game were brought to life." Michael Madsen? Subtlety? We fail to see the link.

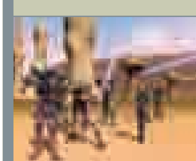




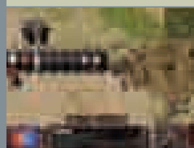
AT IT AGAIN

Jack Thompson recently saw a bill passed outlawing the rental or sale of games to minors in Louisiana, only for it to be blocked. Riddled with restrictions on basic freedoms that led to the over-turning of several other pieces of Thompson-fuelled legislation, it's now waiting for ESA's lawsuit to be heard. Bo Andersen, of the Entertainment Merchants' Association, stated, "The Louisiana law suffers from the same constitutional defects as the Michigan law and five others that have been enjoined on constitutional grounds. It will meet the same fate, and the tax payers of Louisiana will have to pay for the legislature's reckless gamble".





Games like *Star Wars Galaxies* and *World Of WarCraft* are growing in popularity in China.



The Legend Of Mir 2 was China's most popular MMOG, and the game that kick-started the region's interest in the genre.

"THIS YEAR **CHINA WILL OVERTAKE** SOUTH KOREA IN THE SIZE OF ITS **ONLINE GAMING MARKET**"

SLEEPING GIANTS

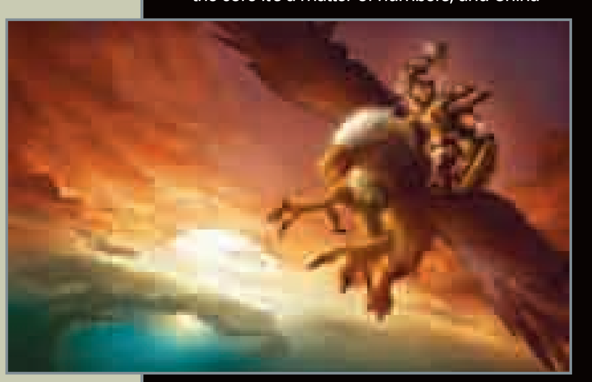
CHINA WAKES UP TO ONLINE GAMING

Such is the velocity of China's current economic boom, that the mere mention of it moving into a new industry is enough to strike fear into the most seasoned of competitors. Now that the veil of communism has been lifted, the awesome potential of its workforce and natural resources has been revealed, and many feel that this is only the beginning of China's rise to economic supremacy. This dominance could well carry over into the world of online gaming, as a recent market report conducted by analyst iResearch seems to indicate. This year will see China take over South Korea in the size of its online gaming market, and with the practice still very much in its infancy China will likely dominate before too long.

Should the current year-on-year increase continue, China's online gaming revenue would stand at $970 million dollars, with South Korea running just $10 million shy. At the core it's a matter of numbers, and China has more. As the most populous country in the world (population: 1.3 billion), even the tiniest drop in the ocean can outstrip the performance of a country the size of South Korea (population: 49 million). There were 110 million Internet users in China at the end of 2005, and that number is expected to double by 2010, by which time China could be almost out of reach with plenty of room to grow.

At the moment, China has had relatively little success with its own online gaming products, while Korean companies like NCsoft and Webzen are major players in European and North American markets. However, as online gaming culture grows – which, if other Asian territories are anything to go by, it will – it logically follows that the number and quality of software developers will rise accordingly.

The one major remaining hurdle for China is its relatively recent adoption of capitalist principles. The whole country is still very wary of credit cards and other such trappings, and these are key for an online community to flourish. James Belcher, author of *China Online*, explains: "The simple act of paying for goods online is still a barrier that e-tailers must overcome… e-commerce is hamstrung on several fronts, ranging from a cash-centric society to geographic limitations for deliveries. Due to the country's lack of freedoms and censorship laws, there are also moral questions to be addressed". Stumbling blocks one and all, but the speed with which China is easing into its role as a world super-power suggests that things won't stay that way for long.

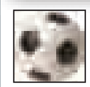



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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



RELATIONSHIP BREAKER

Fans of *Football Manager* rejoice, for Global coreSports may have made your dreams come true. News has surfaced that the company, in partnership with mobile content publisher IncaGold, will soon launch *coreFootball*, the first football management MMOG. The game will be launched by a £5 million marketing campaign, and will allow participants to place cash bets and win prizes of up to £100,000. Supporting up to 100,000 simultaneous users, *coreFootball* will offer interactive 3D matchplay, a comprehensive community service with real-time chat, leaderboards, tournaments, profile management, forums and spectator modes. Executed properly, this could be massive.







We just can't get enough of that big American face.



MOVING ON UP

FILS-AIME PROMOTED TO PRESIDENT

Everybody's favourite self-aggrandising PR voice box Reggie Fils-Aime has been promoted to the position of president and COO of Nintendo of America, as part of a 'pre-Wii-launch' executive reshuffle. Fils-Aime has served as executive vice president of sales and marketing since joining the company in 2003. He replaces current president Tatsumi Kimishima, who will be moved upstairs to become chairman of the board and CEO.

The shuffle cements Nintendo's determination to remain firmly at the top of the handheld ladder, and to move strongly into the next-generation home console market. Saturo Iwata, company president, had the following to say about the various promotions: "Around the world, Nintendo DS has been steadily drawing more people into the videogame category. With the upcoming introduction of Wii, along with the strength of this new leadership team and strong executives already in place, Nintendo will continue to dramatically change the way consumers of all ages interact with their videogame console on a daily basis".

The future is looking far brighter for Nintendo than it has done in a good few years – more power to them, we say.

American games are plastered with these images, courtesy of the ESRB.



FINE TIME

ESRB CLAMPS DOWN ON PUBLISHER NON-DISCLOSURE

After the debacle that was *GTA: San Andreas* Hot Coffee, the Entertainment Software Ratings Board has stated that non-disclosure of videogame content could result in a fine of up to $1 million. So, in the future, if a game ships that contains scenes that the ESRB has not been made aware of, it will be recalled, with the publisher footing the bill as well as an impending fine.

ESRB president Patricia Vance, when speaking to the assembled subcommittee on commerce, stated, "after a game ships, if disclosure is found to have been incomplete, recent enhancements to the ESRB enforcement system will soon allow for the imposition of fines up to USD 1 million", before going on to say that it would be, "a tremendous disincentive for any publisher to even consider not disclosing all pertinent content", considering the financial implications therein.



As a knee-jerk reaction to Hot Coffee, the new legislation is somewhat laughable (it was, after all, a vastly overblown situation), but the ruling itself makes a lot of sense. It is important to have clear guidelines for everyone involved in the videogame production process to avoid more negative press in the mainstream media. Otherwise we'll have Jack Thompson on our backs and no one wants that, do they?




eMag

DATA STREAM

DOWNLOAD COMPLETE

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HOW MUCH?!

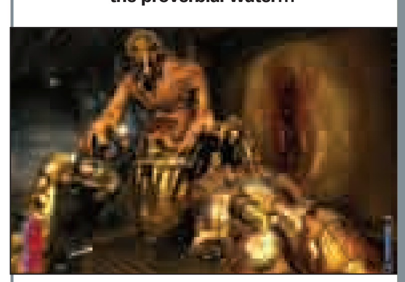
UK retailer Play.com became the first to offer a PS3 bundle for order at a definite price this month. For £549.99, you can be the proud owner of a PS3 with *SingStar*, *WarWawk* and *Formula One '06* on launch day. Well, possibly. Play.com sensibly points out that the games may change and that it's highly unlikely to be able to deliver pre-orders before Christmas due to an 'expected European shortage' of the console. Still – £550! Well, that should set the standard for Game et al to follow with similar incredibly expensive bundle deals…

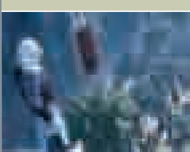




GAMES FOR FREE?

Ours is an expensive hobby, and so it's always of interest when someone offers a way to ease the pain. This month we've discovered that p3mobiles.com is offering its contract customers one free game a month, and apparently it's not just new ones. It promises 'brand new' games for absolutely any console – retro or modern – with 'no restrictions'. We're tempted to call up and ask them for *Alien Soldier* or something similarly obscure, just to test the proverbial water…





Assassin's Creed headed up what was considered a poor E3 line-up for PS3.



There are doubts over whether the European market will warm to Wii's innovative but specialist, motion-sensitive controller.



BATTLEFIELD EUROPE

DEVELOPER CLAIMS THAT NEXT-GEN WAR WILL BE WON AND LOST IN EUROPE

The game industry has always been in the thrall of Japan, but the market has now expanded beyond the reach of its influence, to the point where the US and Europe ignore or castigate a good portion of Japanese output. A divide in taste has formed, and while we love the DS and sit in frenzied anticipation of the Wii, Nintendo's platform will no doubt enjoy the majority of its success in Japan. Microsoft has struggled to break Japan, a fact that Xbox-friendly European gamers forget, but Matt Lee, a developer working for Microsoft's Game Technology Group, has intimated that success in the East is less important than ever.

Speaking to website Ars Technica, Lee said, "Japan is obviously a very important market for us. […] One thing to note, however, is that Japan is not necessarily the most important market for gaming these days." He continues, "The US and Japanese markets are reaching saturation point. The big battleground for us – and everyone – is going to be Europe". Nintendo has dominated Japan for decades and its new platforms are likely to continue this trend. Europe, however, has no such devotion to Sony, Microsoft or Nintendo, and remains fertile ground for all.

> "JAPAN IS NOT NECESSARILY THE MOST IMPORTANT MARKET FOR GAMING"

Wii was initially assumed to be the least successful next-gen platform, with PS3 set to cement Sony's dominance. PS3's delayed release and high price tag have thrown that into question, and Lee doubts the purported power of the console. "[The Cell Processor] isn't as well designed for game development as Sony would have you believe," he claims. "Some aspects of the SPEs, such as the lack of branch prediction, make them particularly unsuited to running most game code, which contains a lot of branches."

"The Xbox 360 has a lot more general-purpose processing power that can be flexibly re-allocated, and all of the Xbox 360 CPU cores have equal access to all memory. The asymmetric nature of the Cell could easily lead to situations where the game has too little of one type of processing power and too much of another." This backs up the claims of several developers who believe it will be easier to realise the full potential of 360, while doing so for PS3 may take some time. With Microsoft's popularity soaring, and months before any competition, Europe could become the battlefield upon which the next-gen war is finally won.




eMag



THE WAITING GAME



My left leg dies five minutes into the gaming session. I realise that any more time spent playing *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* could render me a cripple. Apparently 2,000 pints of blood are pumped round my circulatory system – over 60,000 miles of veins and arteries – every day. What this means for my sudden inability to stand up isn't clear. I'm not a doctor. Google suggests that I may be dead. This sudden sense of my own mortality naturally leads me to thinking about the really important things in life, such as the release dates for forthcoming Xbox Live Arcade titles.

Sometimes all I want to do is sit in, watch *Tron* and think about the Cheat mode in the Atari version of *Kung-Fu Master*. I'm easy like that. Sometimes I just want to play exactly the sort of casual game that's available on Xbox Live Arcade. I'm a big fan of cheap, entertaining titles and Arcade has given me a thalidomide handful.

More games are on the way that are either ports of classic titles, or that could have been programmed for home systems any time in the past 15 years. The point is that *Street Fighter II, Defender* et al aren't available now due entirely to a retarded release mechanism. It couldn't be more infuriating. You can't play *Pinball* yet because they want to drip feed you slowly and drain the money you're bound to give them slowly throughout an entire financial year. You'll get the money anyway, idiots. Is this paranoia ushered by a nervous system in revolt? I don't want an image of Blanka – I want to see Ryu walking into the sunset after I've given some American a dead leg. I want to live now.

Mr X will affect your life somehow. He knows this.

FROM THE FRONT

TAKETWO TAKES IT, MIDWAY'S FUTURE LOOKS ROSY, AND REBELLION CAPITALISES ON EMPIRE'S MISFORTUNE

TAKETWO SUFFERS BIG LOSSES



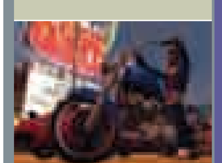
TAKE THAT

With the industry in such a state of flux, even the sturdiest companies are beginning to waver. TakeTwo Interactive – publisher of *Grand Theft Auto, Max Payne 2* and numerous other commercial successes – has revealed substantial losses for the second quarter, ending on 30 April this year.

Despite an increase in overall revenue, from $222.1 million to $265.1 million, TakeTwo made a net loss of $50.4 million, a staggering five times more than the equivalent period last year. In the middle of a sizeable streamlining operation, the amount includes $26.3 million given over to asset write-offs and studio closures.

TakeTwo enjoyed great success from its co-publishing deal on *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* with *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* also providing good sales revenue. However, without a cash cow on the scale of *GTA: San Andreas*, this year was always going to be a little leaner than last. CEO Paul Eibeler explained, "Near-term financial results continue to be impacted by the console transition, but we are confident that we have positioned TakeTwo for the long term."

With more *Grand Theft Auto* thought to be on the way, that may well be the case, but for now TakeTwo will continue to suffer in the third quarter due to a further $3 million needed for the closure of another, as yet unknown, developer. Couple that with the millions poured into relocating its publishing headquarters to Geneva, and TakeTwo is certainly not in the clear yet.



Without the sales of *San Andreas*, TakeTwo has begun to feel the pinch.



TakeTwo enjoyed some success through a co-publishing deal on *Oblivion*.

MAKING A KILLING

THE HOUSE THAT MORTAL KOMBAT BUILT CLEANS UP

It can feel like we're drowning in stories of financial losses, transitional markets and studio closures, so it's heartening to hear that one publisher is still on the up. Midway Games has completed the private placement of $75 million in convertible senior notes as part of its growth strategy for next-gen consoles.

The company will likely earn in the region of $72.3 million from the offering, with the money being distributed across all areas of the business. It's also been suggested that Midway will use part of the cash to fund possible future acquisitions and alliances with other software developers, pointing to an ambitious future for the company.

David Zucker, CEO of Midway, stated, "We believe this offering will help us effectively execute our strategic plans and become one of the top-tier publishers in the next console cycle. We intend to continue to grow our revenue base by creating high-quality next-generation games, building our intellectual property portfolio, and expanding our publishing business".

Lacklustre titles like *The Suffering* have seen Midway fall on hard times.



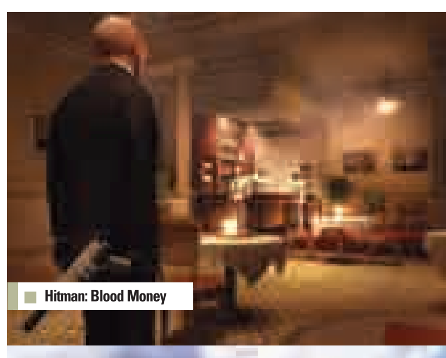
Midway is the oldest surviving US game developer, and the team behind arcade classics like *SpyHunter*.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	2006 FIFA World Cup	Electronic Arts	Multi
2	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	Multi
3	Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	Multi
4	MotoGP '06	THQ	Xbox 360
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	Multi
6	Prof Kawashima's Brain Training	Nintendo	DS
7	Sensible Soccer 2006	Kuju	Multi
8	Half-Life 2: Episode One	Electronic Arts	PC
9	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
10	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	Multi

Well, that's a surprise. In the middle of football fever, *FIFA World Cup* takes the top spot. We have no idea what *X-Men: The Official Game* is still doing at number ten, though. People just don't listen, do they. They really should.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 10 June 2006)


Hitman: Blood Money


MotoGP '06


Sensible Soccer 2006

REBELLION ROLL ON

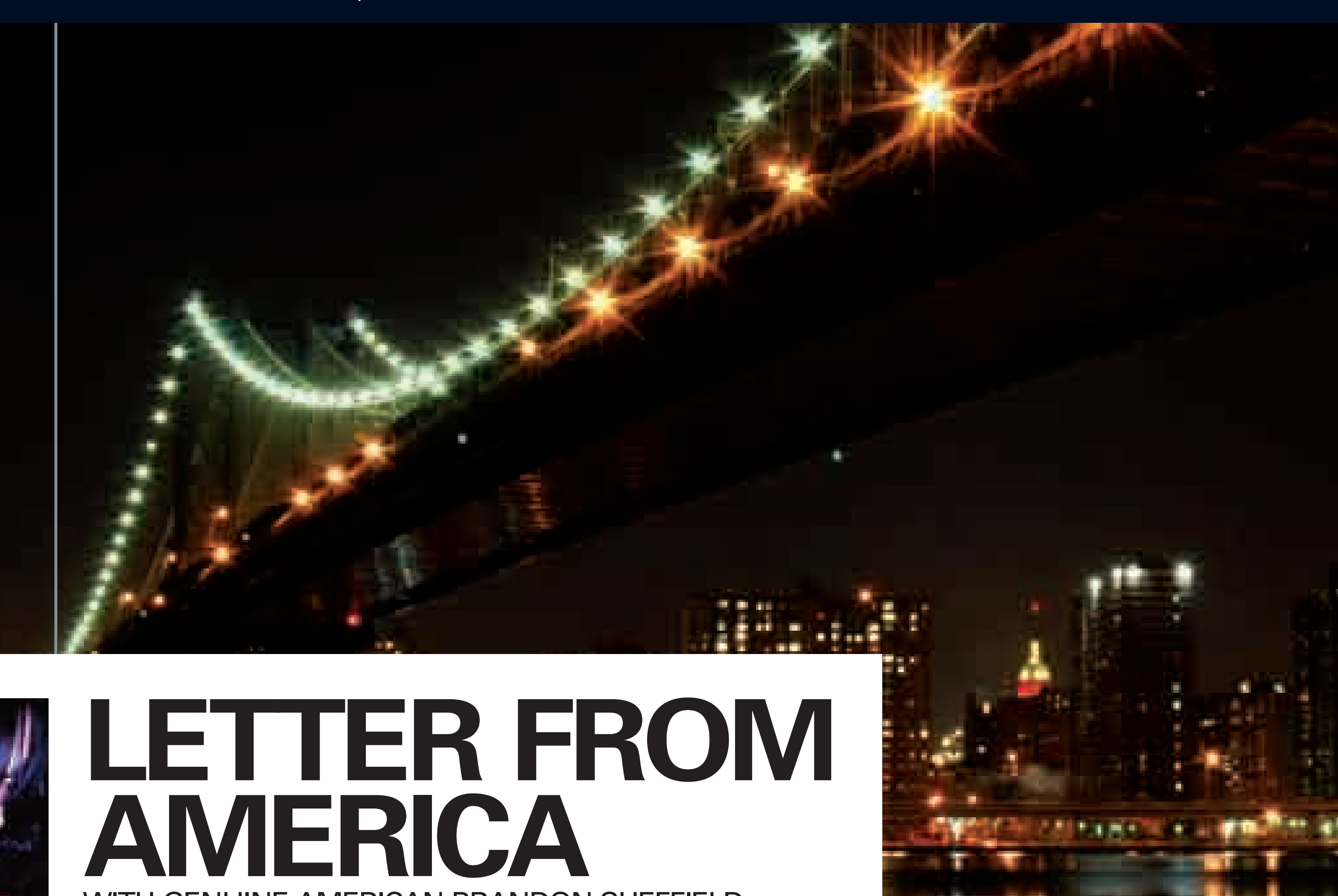
DEVELOPER ACQUIRES STRANGELIGHT STUDIOS

UK developer Rebellion, the team behind *Rogue Trooper* and *Sniper Elite*, continued its expansion with the successful takeover of Strangelight Studios, a former internal studio of publisher Empire Interactive which has failed to maintain a strong market presence and is facing financial difficulty. Empire has just emerged from extensive takeover negotiations with an undisclosed party, but the deal fell through, leaving its future very uncertain. The sale of Strangelight is part of a larger restructuring plan by Empire while Rebellion seems to be going from strength to strength – having recently secured the assets of Core Design from SCi.

Strangelight Studios was behind the PC conversions of Sega's hit games *Virtua Tennis* and *Crazy Taxi* along with the recent adaptation of *Starship Troopers*. Rebellion is expected to announce all new titles it currently has in development soon, as well as divulging its plans for further expansion.

Rebellion is behind the decidedly so-so *Sniper Elite.*

Strangelight Studios was responsible for porting *Crazy Taxi* to PC.



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD

Will there be an iconic character for the next gen as enduring as our pal Sonic?

"THERE WAS MAGIC ONCE. VIDEOGAMES COULD DO SOMETHING THAT SMALL PIECES OF EXPERIENCE THAT HELD YOUR ATTENTION

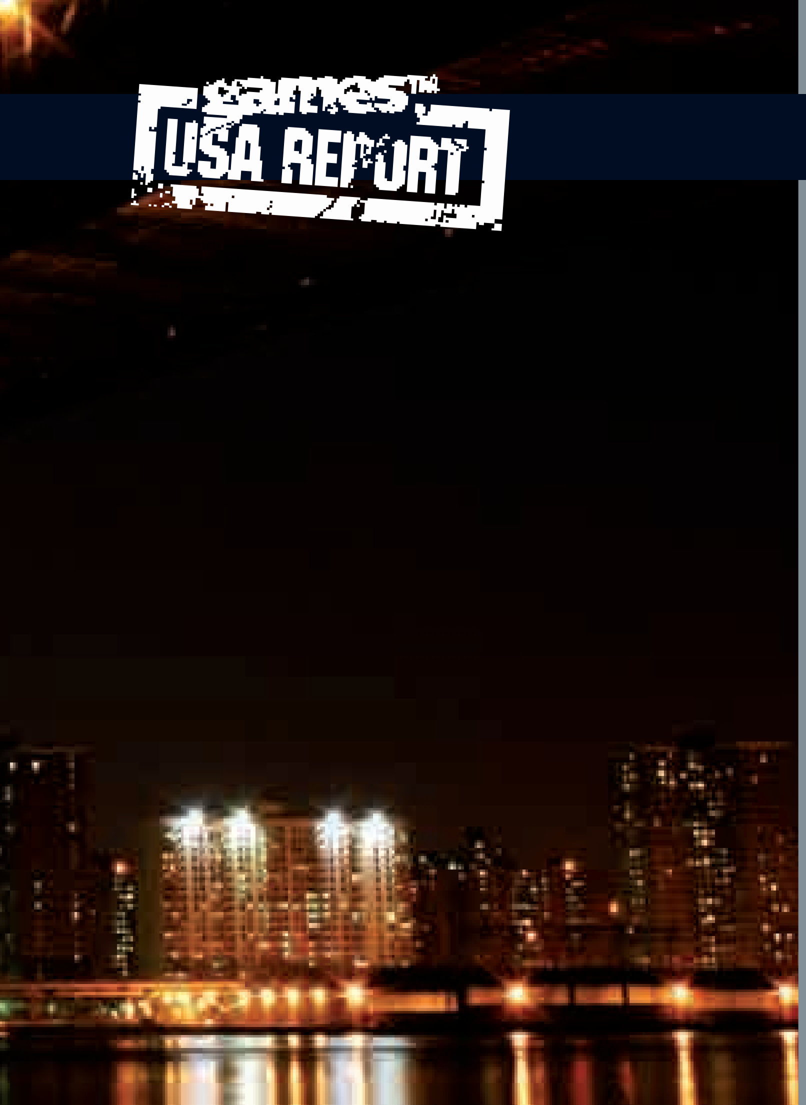
It's the evening of 25 December 1993. The family opened presents during the day and there was the smell of wood smoke in the air – the flu had jammed halfway and nobody could be bothered to fix it, so smoke occasionally wafted into the living room. It wasn't an unpleasant smell, and at 12 years old I didn't see why we didn't just leave it half-jammed all the time. The glow of presents over, we were now faced with the realities of what we'd been given, which tends not to match the fever of anticipation, at that age.

I got a Turbo Duo with my Christmas money, a console which never really penetrated the UK significantly but which had occupied my thoughts for some time until I actually got my hands on one. It was used, had one joint missing from the lid so it stuck a bit, and a scuff across the face. But I appreciated it mightily. Sitting on the floor of an only slightly sooty living room, I plugged the thing in for the first time while family members argued in the kitchen about something that was, I'm sure, very very important to somebody. I could see the reflection of the Christmas tree in the television, with its blinking lights, warped by the convex glass. I kneeled in front of the wooden entertainment centre we'd inherited from a neighbour who'd moved away, and turned the knob on the brown RCA tube television.

I put in *Ys: Book I & II*, and gaped at the animated cut-scene with CD-quality sound pouring through the TV's single speaker as huge system-driven sprite tiles panned across the screen. I was immediately engaged in a way that I hadn't been prepared for. I played for two hours or more while a holiday died in the air around me. It was engrossing and involving, yet always a game. I was sympathetic with, and encouraging toward the protagonist, yet I was never him. I made maps of dungeons, I listened to spoken dialogue without realising (perhaps caring?) how poor the acting was. Though did you know Thomas Haden Church, co-star of the movie *Sideways*, was the voice of peripheral character Goban Toba in one of his earliest roles? I suppose you do now.

There was magic once, it occurs to me. Videogames could do something for you that nothing else really could. They were small pieces of experience and learning that held your attention, but also made you feel something. With all the talk of emotion in games, and advanced narrative, I dare say I was much more emotional in my treatment of games in the older days. Granted, a large part of this is down to my youth at the time. But part of it is also a sense of whimsy that once existed, yet only now and again sputters to life in the common era.

Who's to blame for the change in direction? The trend toward realism and experience over character? It's us, of course, who else could it be? We've bought into it as consumers. And again, it's not as though we can simply go back. The fact is, once we've had the visceral experience of these 3D, immersive



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE



NOTHING ELSE COULD. THEY WERE AND MADE YOU FEEL SOMETHING"

games – and they are actually starting to have some design sense now that the lustre has finally worn off the third dimension – we can appreciate these old games, but not in the same way. It's in an 'ah, how well I remember this' sort of way, not in the way of appreciating something for the first time. The wonder is all but gone and we're lucky to catch glimpses.

What I wonder, most specifically, is how the next generation will feel about games, once they reach my age. What will be the wonder of their youth? They never did have *Super Mario Bros 3* or *Sonic 2*, or *Final Fantasy VI* as an experience of newness. They had *Ratchet & Clank* and they might have had *Ico*, and there's some value to both – but they also had *Sonic Riders*, they also had *Pac-Land 3*, and god forbid, they might even get *Duke Nukem Forever*.

In terms of the beloved character-based series that we hold dear, they get the dregs, the final scrapings before the pot is washed and disposed of all together. What they have as a fresh experience is precisely that – games that are experiences, that are to be played in first-person, that are to be either identified with, or which emulate reality, and are a greater escape. It's not that I worry about children being influenced by games, or shooting each other. It breeds a person that's jaded to the medium, which has its upsides, but makes the whole thing very serious. I worry whether they will learn to care about fun. Am I such an old man already?

Many thanks
Brandon

SEE THE LITE

So we have the DS Lite here now. In fact, by the time you're reading this, you guys will probably have it there as well. Despite being little more than an upgrade, people on the bus I use have them. Some I recognise as people I've previously seen with the 'old' version. A nation of hardcore consumers? Perhaps. A superb marketing campaign on the part of Nintendo? Definitely. I think we just all love fun.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	PS2
2	Over The Hedge	Activision	PS2
3	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	PS2
4	X-Men: The Official Game	Activision	Xbox
5	Kingdom Hearts II	Square Enix	PS2
6	Over The Hedge	Activision	GC
7	Major League Baseball 2K6	2K Sports	PS2
8	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	Xbox
9	Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	Xbox 360
10	The Godfather: The Game	Electronic Arts	PS2

(Updated 25/06/06)


Kingdom Hearts II
The Godfather: The Game



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

Surely, by definition, you shouldn't need to learn common sense.

"YOU CAN GIVE A NATION AND ITS PEOPLE NO GREATER COMPLIMENT HONESTLY SEEK TO AVOID SITUATIONS THAT WOULD

My mother was always telling me that I had no common sense. So maybe this game will help me find a nice girl, settle down, and stop playing that damn guitar.

Announced quietly on page 191 of this week's *Famitsu*, *Common Sense Training For Adults* will be published by Nintendo for DS this October. The software is targeted at "Men and women, young and old", who still have "something to learn". It contains trivia and brief, multiple-choice-based, problem-solving challenges. Like *Brain Training*, the game is touted as something you can play regularly to watch your common sense improve, so as to "avoid embarrassment in the future". I'm not kidding; that's what it says. I feel vaguely flattered, and I'm not sure why. I'm going to Bic Camera to pre-buy this game, and then line up the night before the release date in my winter coat, mittens, and big sunglasses.

Exaggerations aside, the game is interesting. *Brain Training* is positioned to keep people's brains sharp, and it honestly looks to prevent conditions such as Alzheimer's. This software, however, is aimed at something totally different.

I hope the sequel is called 'Tokyo Railway Authority And Nintendo Co-operate To Bring You How To Walk Correctly From Point A To Point B In The Train Station Without Any Sudden Stops Or Turnarounds, And Put Your Ticket In The Correct Slot DS Training'. The title would certainly be long enough. Or maybe 'How To Not Act So Old While Being Very Old DS Training'. I'm certain they'll release this game (localised, of course – that would be common sense) in Britain. The British, with unflinching faith in their own common sense, would no doubt buy it to prove themselves correct, and have 'ironic fun'. I wonder if they'd release this in America, though. Would they see the point?

I say this as a tribute to that Taco-Bell-blessed country. You see, you can give a nation and its people no greater compliment than to say that they honestly seek to avoid situations that would require common sense. Citizens of Tokyo run on different wavelengths. When you're surrounded by people at all times and you commute more than an hour to work, aboard a train of sparkling cleanliness, packed against other passengers like meat molecules in a sausage, you're filled with a great desire to behave like a reasonable human being. There is even less shame in self-help here than in countries where people drag their spouses to marriage counselling – and though there has yet to be an addictive videogame that inspires good dental hygiene, there do exist entire stores that sell condoms, so as to completely eliminate the shame of bringing a box of condoms up to a cash register. In such a case, you know no one's going to look at you sideways or think weird things; in Tokyo, you surf from moment to moment, to and from situations where you're surrounded by people who do this sort of thing all day.



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON 46:

BEMOANING LACK OF COMMON SENSE	KEYWORD: HIJOUSHIKI = LACK OF COMMON SENSE
Hijoushiki de, reigi shirazu no otoko to wa mou iyada.	I've not the patience to deal with a mannerless man lacking in common sense.
Ima no hijoushiki na hito ga oosugiru.	There are too many people, these days, lacking in common sense.
Shokudou no tsukue no ue ni aruiteta hijoushiki wo mikaketa.	I saw some person lacking in common sense walking along the top of the cafeteria tables.
Koshuu no menzen no me no mae ni denwa ni deru koto wa hijoushiki nanode gaman shita.	Though I knew it was not at all common-sensical to answer my cellular phone in a public place, I endured.
Kiraina taipu: hijoushikina otoko.	My most-hated personality type: men lacking in common sense.

THAN TO SAY THAT THEY REQUIRE COMMON SENSE"

Nintendo's marketing strategy for *Common Sense Training* is easily two or three months away from being revealed, though if it manages to package and present the game as the high pop art the other games in the series constitute, it'll likely take off.

I'm sitting here at my desk brainstorming possible exercises with a colleague. "You enter an Internet cafe because the sign outside said 'One hour: ¥100.' You exit 55 minutes later, to be told your bill is ¥599. You ask why, and are told it's because the 'free drink', not mentioned on the sign, even in fine print, costs ¥499 an hour. Do you: A) complain about false advertising and refuse to pay B) grumble and pay C) acknowledge that nothing is free, and pay, or D) not care?" If positioned aggressively enough, this game could perhaps lead to the start of a 'Japanese Better Business Bureau'. It could cause a true cultural revolution.

Is it too early to call this one a candidate for Game Of The Year even though I haven't played it yet?"

Kind regards



WATCH THE NEWS ON YOUR PSP

As of 1 June, you can view Nichi TV news on your PSP. It has set up a website in co-operation with Sony Computer Entertainment. I'm sure all of the power-brokers munching on granola bars and sipping lattes in Starbucks will give you an authoritative nod if they see you watching Japanese financial news on your PSP on a rainy day.

Actually, I don't think you can partake in this service outside Japan. I hate to make this another 'look how great the DS is' opinion column, though, er, they're releasing this Network Services Card for Nintendo DS this fall, and it's going to turn DS into kind of an Internet browser/email thing. It's going to cost half as much as a DS Lite, which for some reason makes me think, "Well, it's not some cheap novelty thing". And now that I know the new Pokémon games for DS are going to have voice chat … man, this thing might seriously make Japan's iron-fisted cellular phone companies angry.

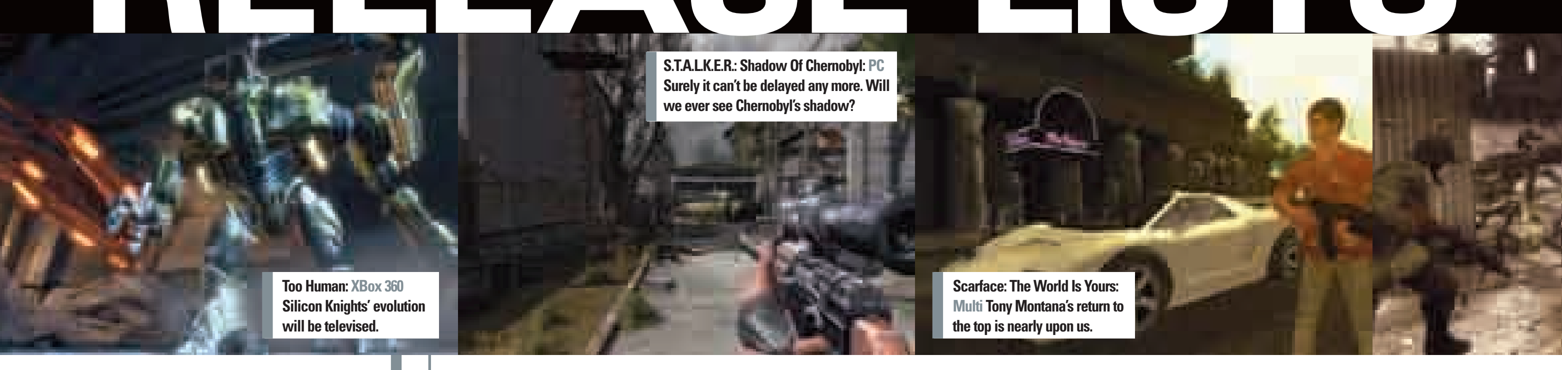
JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo	DS
2	Brain Training 2	Nintendo	DS
3	World Soccer Winning Eleven 10	Konami	PS2
4	Digimon Story	Bandai	DS
5	Brain Training	Nintendo	DS
6	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
7	English Training	Nintendo	DS
8	Tetris DS	Nintendo	DS
9	Hisshou Pachinko Series Vol 5	D3 Publisher	PS2
10	Doko Demo Issyo	Sony	PSP

(Updated week ending 25/06/06)


New Super Mario Bros
World Soccer Winning Eleven 10

RELEASE LISTS

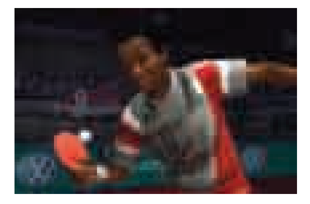

Too Human: XBox 360 Silicon Knights' evolution will be televised.
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl: PC Surely it can't be delayed any more. Will we ever see Chernobyl's shadow?
Scarface: The World Is Yours: Multi Tony Montana's return to the top is nearly upon us.


games™ MOST PLAYED

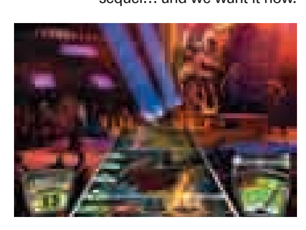
LOCOROCO
Format: PSP
Publisher: Sony
Everything handheld gaming should be, *LocoRoco* has not failed to charm one single person since its arrival in the office. The most common response to its unstoppable generation of glee is "this is the best thing ever". It very nearly is.



ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS
Format: Xbox 360
Publisher: Rockstar
Xbox Live has proved an irresistible test of our racket ball skills of late. Despite the general overuse of Jesper, the lack of lag, and fierce competition this takes the table tennis experience to the next level. If only Rockstar would release an anti-Jesper patch – for our sanity if nothing else.



GUITAR HERO
Format: PS2
Publisher: Sony
With summer comes drinking, and with drinking comes *Guitar Hero*. Dual Gibsons, 'Ultimate Margaritas' and good company are the perfect way to wind down after a long summers day or wind up for a long summer night. We want that sequel… and we want it now.





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
14 July	Cars	THQ	
21 July	Jaws	THQ	
28 July	The Ant Bully	Midway	
28 July	WWII: Air Supremacy	Midas	
28 July	Zoo Cube	Midas	
AUGUST '06			
04 August	Monster House	THQ	
04 August	SingStar Anthems	Sony	
TBC	Metal Slug 3D	SNK	
SEPTEMBER '06			
20 September	Capcom Classics V2	Capcom	
Q3 '06			
TBC	Aquanox: The Angel's Tears	JoWood	
TBC	Atelier Iris: Eternal Mana	Koei	
TBC	Battlestations: Midway	SCi	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Koch Media	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Yakuza	Sega	
TBC '06			
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Buzz!: The Movie Quiz	Sony	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors 5: Empires	Koei	
TBC	Final Fantasy XII	Sony	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts II	Sony	
TBC	Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence	Konami	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	Midway	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	
Q4 '06	Scarface: The World Is Yours	VU	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	SpyHunter: Nowhere To Run	Midway	
TBC '07			
TBC	God Of War 2	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Guitar Hero 2	Activision	Wanted



PLAYSTATION3

Month	Title	Publisher	
NOVEMBER '06			
TBC	Assassin's Creed	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Heavenly Sword	Sony	Wanted
TBC	MotorStorm	Sony	
TBC	Rainbow Six: Vegas	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Resistance: Fall Of Man	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Tekken 6	Sony	Wanted
TBC	WarHawk	Sony	



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
14 July	Cars	THQ	
AUGUST '06			
04 August	Monster House	THQ	
TBC '06			
TBC	Chaos Field	03 Entertainment	
TBC	Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Naruto	D3 Publisher	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	



XBOX

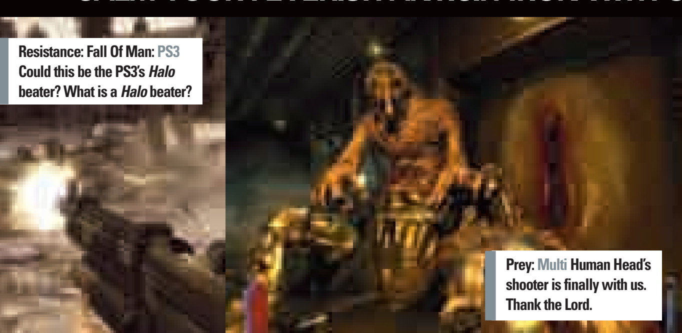
Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
07 July	World Tour Golf	Oxygen	
21 July	Jaws Unleashed	Majesco	
Q3 '06			
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC	America's Army: Rise Of A Soldier	Ubisoft	
TBC	Bully	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness	Konami	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC '06			
TBC	25 To Life	Eidos	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	Midway	
TBC	Panzer Elite Action	JoWood	
Q4 '06	Scarface: The World Is Yours	VU Games	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	



XBOX 360

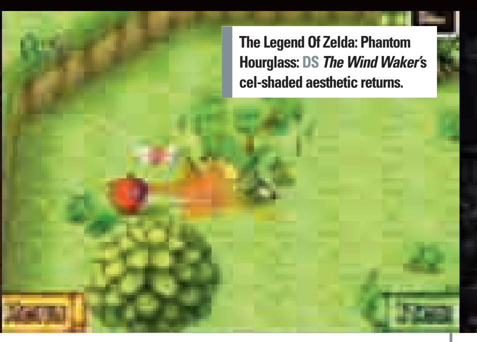
Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
14 July	LOTR: Battle For Middle-earth II	Electronic Arts	
14 July	Prey	2K Games	
SEPTEMBER '06			
01 September	Saint's Row	THQ	
15 September	Dead Rising	Capcom	Wanted
TBC '06			
TBC	AITD: Near Death Investigation	Atari	
TBC	BioShock	2K Games	Wanted
TBC	Blue Dragon	Microsoft	
TBC	Crackdown	Microsoft	
TBC	DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball 2	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Enchanted Arms	Ubisoft	
TBC	Frame City Killer	Namco	

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Resistance: Fall Of Man: PS3 Could this be the PS3's *Halo* beater? What is a *Halo* beater?

Prey: Multi Human Head's shooter is finally with us. Thank the Lord.



The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass: DS *The Wind Waker's* cel-shaded aesthetic returns.



Forbidden Siren 2: PS2 Terrifying tension from Sony Japan.

TBC	Gears Of War	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	The Godfather	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Huxley	Webzen	
TBC	LMA Manager 2006	Codemasters	
TBC	Lost Planet	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Ninety-Nine Nights	Microsoft	
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	
TBC	Possessed	Namco	
TBC	Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega	
TBC	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	Ubisoft	
TBC	Stranglehold	Midway	
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	Wanted
TBC	The Darkness	2K Games	
Q4 '06	TimeShift	VU Games	
TBC	Too Human	Microsoft	
TBC	Viva Piñata	Microsoft	
TBC 07			
TBC	Army Of Two	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Forza Motorsport 2	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Halo 3	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Mass Effect	Microsoft	
TBC	Shadowrun	Microsoft	
TBC	The Club	Sega	
TBC	Virtua Tennis 3	Sega	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
14 July	Prey	2K Games	
21 July	CivCity: Rome	2K Games	
21 July	Civilization IV: Warlords	2K Games	
28 July	The Ant Bully	Midway	
AUGUST '06			
18 August	El Matador	Ascaron	
SEPTEMBER '06			
08 September	WOW: Burning Crusade	VU Games	Wanted
15 September	Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death	THQ	
22 September	Company Of Heroes	THQ	
Q2 '06			
TBC	American McGee Presents: Bad Day LA	Enlight	
TBC '06			
Q4 '06	Caesar IV	VU Games	
TBC	Crysis	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	Activision	
TBC	Gothic III	JoWood	
TBC	Hellgate: London	Namco	
Q4 '06	Joint Task Force	VU Games	
TBC	Reservoir Dogs	Eidos	
TBC	Spore	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	
TBC	Tabula Rasa	NCsoft	Wanted
TBC	Titan Quest	THQ	

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
14 July	Cars	THQ	
AUGUST '06			
04 August	Monster House	THQ	
SEPTEMBER '06			
TBC	Drill Dozer	Nintendo	Wanted

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
14 July	Cars	THQ	
14 July	PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	D3 Publisher	
21 July	Def Jam Fight For NY: Takeover	Electronic Arts	
21 July	Infected	THQ	
21 July	Juiced Eliminator	THQ	
21 July	Miami Vice	VU Games	
21 July	Mortal Kombat: Unchained	Midway	
28 July	Field Commander	Ubisoft	
SEPTEMBER '06			
08 September	Ultimate Ghosts 'N' Goblins	Capcom	
OCTOBER '06			
13 October	Power Stone Collection	Capcom	
20 October	GTA: Vice City Stories	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC '06			
TBC	Dragon Ball Z Shin Budokai	Atari	
TBC	Gangs Of London	Sony	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4: Mobile	Sony	
TBC	NBA Ballers Rebound	Midway	
TBC	Talkman	Sony	
TBC	Silent Hill Origins	Konami	Wanted
TBC	MGS: Portable Ops	Konami	

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
JULY '06			
14 July	Cars	THQ	
14 July	Micro Machines V4	Codemasters	
AUGUST '06			
04 August	Monster House	THQ	
11 August	Age Of Empires	Majesco	
Q3 '06			
TBC	Boktai 2	Konami	
TBC	Harvest Moon	Rising Star	
TBC	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	
TBC '06			
TBC	Chibi Robo Park Patrol	Nintendo	
TBC	Elite Beat Agents	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Guilty Gear	SNK	
TBC	Last Ninja	Play It	
TBC	Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	
TBC	Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	Nintendo	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

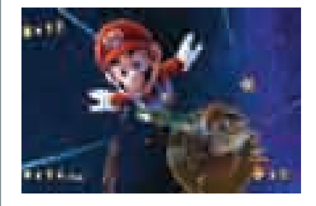
ASSASSIN'S CREED

Format: PS3
Publisher: Ubisoft
Collecting E3's Best In Show awards as if they were going out of fashion, this most pleasant of surprises is one of the few truly inspiring PS3 titles. Free-running, assassinations, crowd control, sci-fi/medieval setting AND incredible high-definition visuals? We'll take some of that.



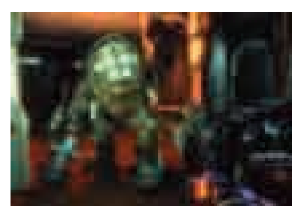
SUPER MARIO GALAXY

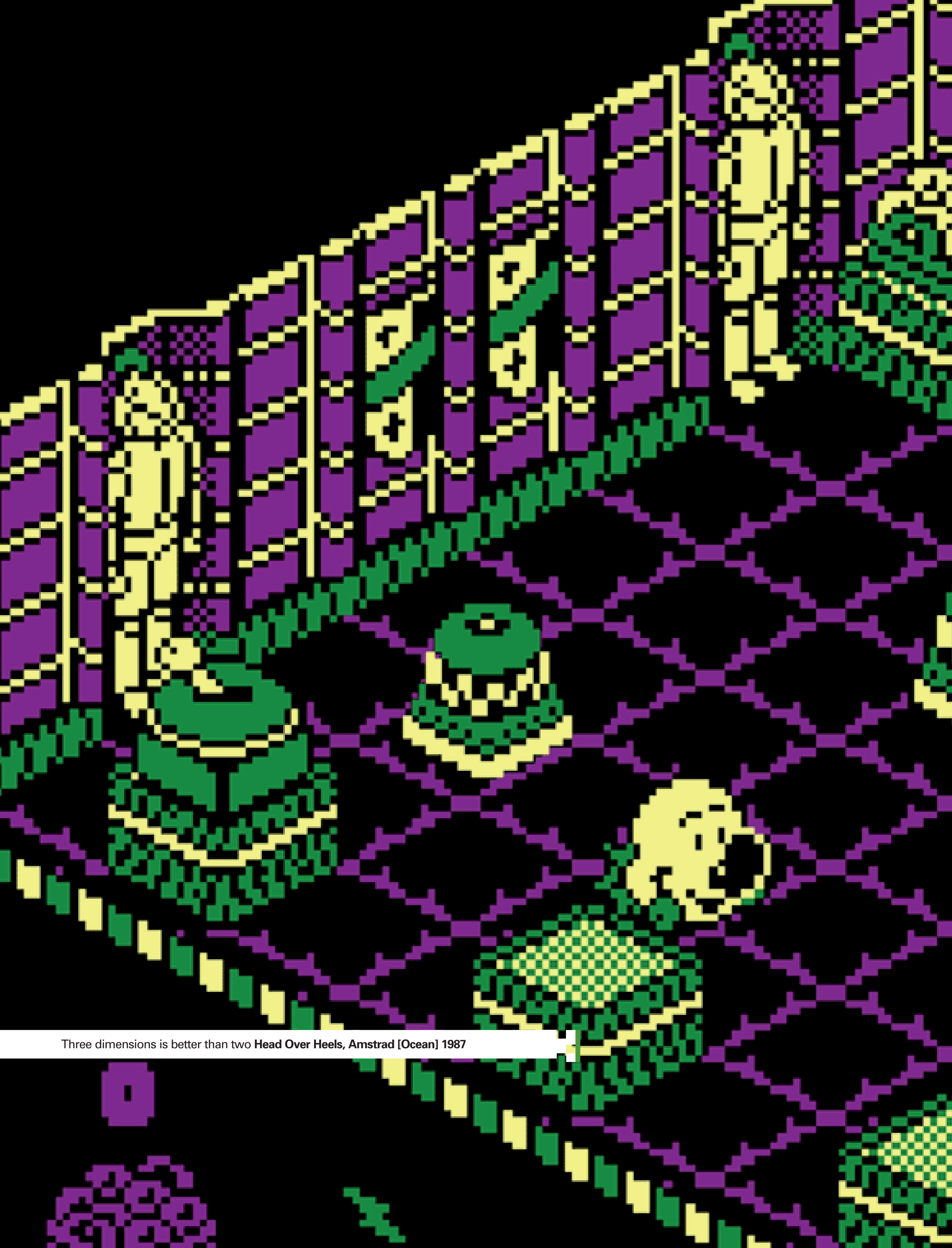
Format: Wii
Publisher: Nintendo
Is there anything that screams 'fun' more than little Mario leaping between planets via the Wii controller? No. There is not. A brief E3 hands-on has only whetted our appetite for what should be another magnificent *Super Mario* game. Mr Miyamoto, you spoil us.



BIOSHOCK

Format: Multi
Publisher: 2K Games
It takes something truly remarkable to grab our attention when it comes to the FPS genre, and *BioShock* is already looking like it will be every bit as successful as the wonderful System Shock 2. Art deco styling, emergent AI and a terrifying atmosphere – 2K Games is on to another winner.





Three dimensions is better than two **Head Over Heels, Amstrad [Ocean] 1987**



BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

UP IN ARMS

ROAD TO HILL 30 + PHYSICS x DRAMA = HELL'S HIGHWAY

"WHAT IS MOST EXCITING TO ME IS THAT WE HAVE MORE POWER TO CREATE EVEN MORE COMPELLING AND IMMERSIVE STORIES"

RANDY PITCHFORD – CEO, GEARBOX

Cover, as always, plays a crucial role in the *Brothers In Arms* experience.

BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY

XBOX 360/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

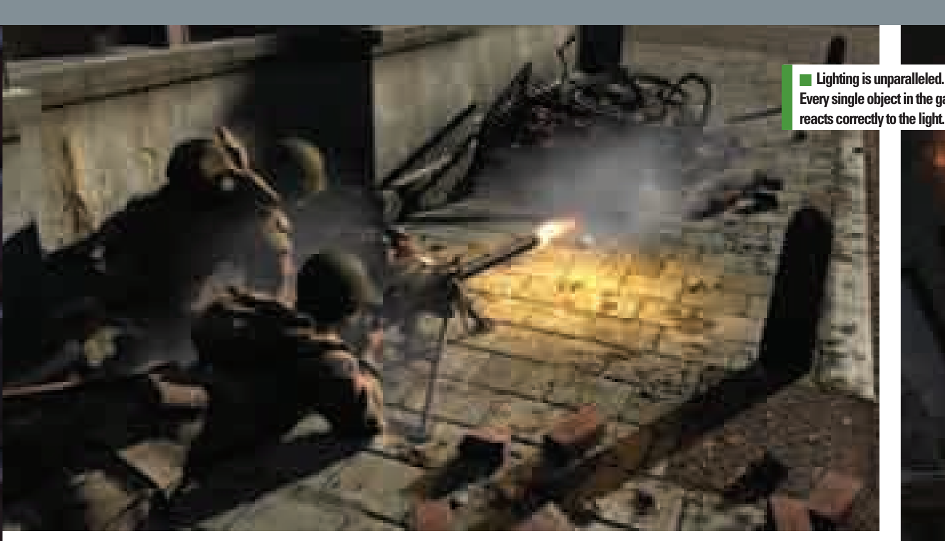
■ Gearbox Software cut its teeth in the world of ports, taking *Half-Life* to PS2 and *Halo* to PC. After two highly successful *Brothers In Arms* tales, though, it has now established itself as a top-tier development studio. *Hell's Highway* should be its greatest achievement to date.

HISTORY



■ **BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30** 2005 [Multi]
■ **BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD** 2005 [Multi]







■ Lighting is unparalleled. Every single object in the game reacts correctly to the light.

HOW GEARBOX REDEFINED THE WAR GAME

Last month's first-look preview detailed the mission, the concept and the overarching story behind Gearbox's spectacular new FPS, *Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway*. But that wasn't enough. This is a title that could well redefine the FPS genre as we know it, pushing it into the uncharted waters of total immersion, emotional depth and, God forbid, genuine intelligence. This is what next-generation gaming is all about. This is 'Hell's Highway'.

Speaking to Randy Pitchford, CEO of Gearbox, he gives us an insight into just how excited the team is about its new project. "*Brothers In Arms 3* is a next-next-generation game" he enthuses, "Unreal Engine 3 is incredible. It is a very powerful platform for *Brothers In Arms* to be built on and I'm very excited about what the technology has opened up for us for visual fidelity and for new gameplay experiences. The developer side of me is most excited about the new tools that are available to us. The entire development pipeline is more streamlined now so we can implement and test our ideas faster." So what exactly can we expect to see as a result of this meaty new technology? "Close-quarters squad combat with new, interesting and intense tactical puzzles. But the experience will be even more diverse and open with the addition of destructible cover and several new types of special teams for you to command, like bazooka and mortar teams." Pitchford tells us. It all sounds intriguing, no?

"Perhaps the most obvious advantage that Unreal Engine 3 brings to the table is that it helps us bring *Brothers In Arms* to life. It's all about the incredibly realistic visuals the engine is capable of. Our artists finally have the opportunity to create characters and environments that were previously only possible in pre-rendered video," says Pitchford. We're inclined to agree – *Hell's Highway* looks absolutely incredible. Gritty, pin-sharp and with lighting that already eclipses nearly everything 360 has offered up so far, the immersion factor is certainly done no harm by this significant bump in visual clarity. Pitchford agrees: "What is most exciting to me is that we have more power to create even more compelling and immersive stories", he tells us. "Many of the technology advances we are making beyond the stock version of the engine are designed to help us reach that goal. Look at the way characters move and feel and think in the game. When you have a chance, look at their faces. This is a big deal. But it's more than emotion that makes us believe in everything. We're pushing the concept of seamlessness very hard, we're investing in hyper-realistic graphics and we're iterating features like true-world physics and destructible cover. We're not satisfied either. We're not done pushing…"

"A TITLE THAT COULD WELL REDEFINE THE FPS GENRE AS WE KNOW IT"

There's no denying *Hell's Highway's* pedigree. After two extremely successful iterations on current-gen platforms, Gearbox's confidence is clearly sky high. This is the firm's chance to shine, to hit the big time and to show the world that there really is no other choice when it comes to WW2 FPSs. Not content with simply rehashing the previous games, *Hell's Highway* will feature brand new squad mechanics which Gearbox promises will completely reshape the *Brothers In Arms* experience. "I love shooting

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PlayStation3, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Gearbox
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ The next-generation return of the thinking man's WWII shooter, with destructible cover, all-new teams and sumptuous visuals.

CHARACTER BUILDING

It's not the first game to do it, but *Hell's Highway* is extremely determined to make the player feel like he or she is directly in control of a real person. Pitchford explains: "The idea is that the player character is no longer a floating camera with a picture of a gun bolted to it at the bottom of the screen. You can see your own shadows, you can see your own body and your hands and feet. You can look down at your chest and see how many grenades you have left. When you vault over a wall, if you look down you can see your hand plant on the wall and your legs swing over. It really enhances your overall immersion".



Destructible environments, emotional depth… this game has it all, and in spades.

"WITH BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY, GEARBOX IS INVESTING EVERYTHING TO TAKE NEXT-GENERATION GAMING TO AN ENTIRELY NEW LEVEL"
RANDY PITCHFORD – CEO, GEARBOX

the M1 Garand or a Thompson sub-machine gun. But, those things just aren't going to cut it when there's an entire platoon of Germans in front of me and they are supported with tanks," Pitchford explains. "The new teams offer intense new tactical options. I have a machine gun crew which can lay down a tremendous amount of suppressive fire over a huge area. These things are just lead blowers – they'll rip apart wooden fences, shred other kinds of soft cover and really tear people into bits. When the machine gun is ripping, no one wants to stick their head up to take a look. When you're behind a wooden horse cart and the machine gun starts turning it into confetti, you think about a new place to hide really quickly…"

This is the type of next-gen FPS experience we've been clamouring for. And there's more: "I also have a bazooka team that fires a high explosive or armour-piercing rocket at hard targets", Pitchford enthuses. "Bazookas also come in handy when there is a tank that your small arms fire just bounces off. The bazooka round will burn a hole right through the armour and bounce around inside the tank. Whoever is inside that tank that isn't left with a lot of big, huge holes in their body will soon either be blown apart or flat-out melted when the round explodes. I like what the mortar crew brings to the table too. Doesn't matter if I can't see them from the ground level, the mortar drops things on them from above. Just be sure to keep your mortar team safe and back far enough where they aren't going to get sniped or chewed up in the middle of a skirmish. Mortars are just great, indirect fire."

As you may have gathered from Pitchford's enthusiastic explanations of *Hell's Highway's* new squads, the scope of the battles has increased significantly. "The maps are far bigger than before," he explains. "A typical *Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway* mission area is at least four times the size of a mission area in *BIA1* or *2*. The scope of the combat is larger as well. There are more allies and enemies involved than ever before. The whole sense of scale and scope is strongly multiplied over the previous *Brothers In Arms* games. It's fortunate that we have the next-generation technology to support the demands of the historical operation." Imagine battles on a scale with *Call Of Duty 2*, but with direct hands-on control of your team-mates, unsurpassed visuals and a seamless narrative linking it all together, and you'll have *Hell's Highway*.

The word 'seamless' is key to Gearbox's plans. The previous *Brothers In Arms* games told a convincing and heart-warming story, but the constant breaks between missions hampered the verisimilitude somewhat. *Hell's Highway* is different. The *Half-Life* influence is clear. "We're putting a lot of effort into making this game feel less like a game and more like an experience," Pitchford claims, "we are implementing seamless level loads so that the traditional 'mission' feel of most games will not be present. This game will feel much more fluid and open compared to others in the past."

"THIS IS GEARBOX'S CHANCE TO SHINE, TO HIT THE BIG TIME AND TO SHOW THE WORLD THAT THERE REALLY IS NO OTHER CHOICE WHEN IT COMES TO WWII FPSs"

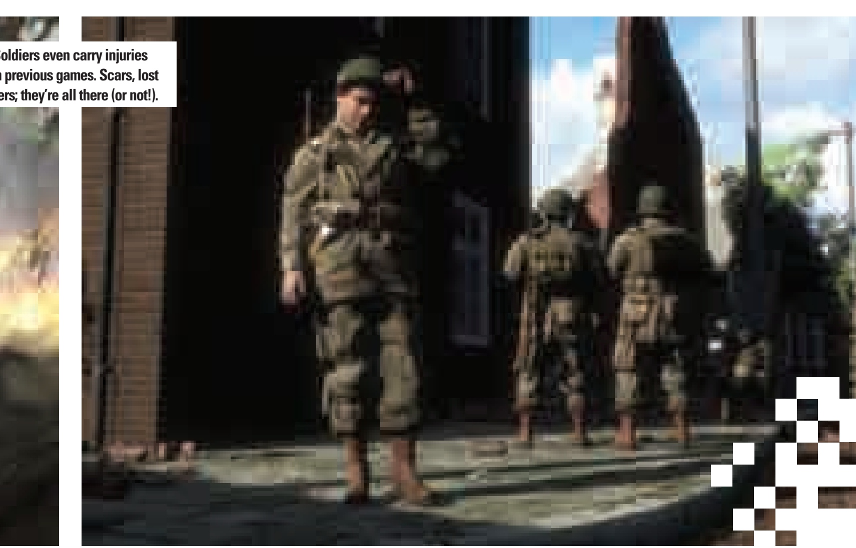
And what an experience. *Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway* is doing everything possible to be THE first-person shooter this winter. With *Halo 3* not due until the new year, Gearbox's latest has a clear run at the title of 'First Essential Next-gen FPS'. The remaining months of development will iron out the few cracks evident in the current early code, but already *Hell's Highway* has become your most anticipated shooter of the year. Get ready – it's going to be hell.

PACE YOURSELF

In the quest for bigger and better videogaming, one crucial aspect is often overlooked. Pace. *Hell's Highway* is different. "The goal we have is that for the typical player our game doesn't feel too short, but nor will it feel too long," Pitchford tells us, "We'll feel really good if everyone who plays the game wants to finish it and that when it's finished it feels like the experience was as long as it should've been." Good stuff. How many times have you played through a game and felt that its ending dragged out, *Return Of The King*-style, just to give some false impression of value for money? This is the age of cinematic gaming, and as such videogame pacing is incredibly important. More developers, please take note.



Soldiers even carry injuries from previous games. Scars, lost fingers; they're all there (or not!).



VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

THE BEST OF THE BEST

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3, Arcade
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: AM2
RELEASE: Q1 '07
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

A further refinement of the purist's fighter of choice. Two new characters, stunning visuals and the promise of even deeper combat. Excellent.

PS3 **It's no coincidence that *Virtua Fighter* has become the arcade beat-'em-up of choice over the years.** A fighter with more depth, precision, balance and demand for excellence simply does not exist, but these aren't the only reasons that Sega's masterwork is so revered. As much as anything else, it's the respect and dedication that the team at AM2 displays. The studio's accuracy when recreating the martial arts that *Virtua Fighter* represents has won over many fans. The sheer amount of attacks, the character movement, the focus on weight balance and highly precise timing… it's simply unparalleled in gaming.

We're also excited about getting to grips with the two new combatants. Joining the likes of Akira, Lau and Lion this year are Luchador El Blaze, who looks suspiciously like Mexican pro-wrestling legend Ultimo Dragon, and Eileen, who is a master of monkey-style kung fu. Yes, monkey style. Now, in any other fighting game, we'd be interested in how the characters looked or their relative backstories, but this is *Virtua Fighter 5*. The clue is in the name. The prospect of getting to grips with these two fascinating fighting styles is salivating to say the least. Eileen could prove to be the most unique of all the fighters. With a low centre of gravity, completely unpredictable movement, and lightning-quick reactions, we can see her becoming the hardcore's character of choice. El Blaze will bring with him a catalogue of highflying manoeuvres and Mixed Martial Arts-style submissions, and should be the first Mexican wrestling character that truly provides fans of the 'sport' an accurate depiction of their heroes.

> "THE STUDIO'S ACCURACY WHEN RECREATING THE MARTIAL ARTS THAT VIRTUA FIGHTER REPRESENTS HAS WON OVER MANY FANS"

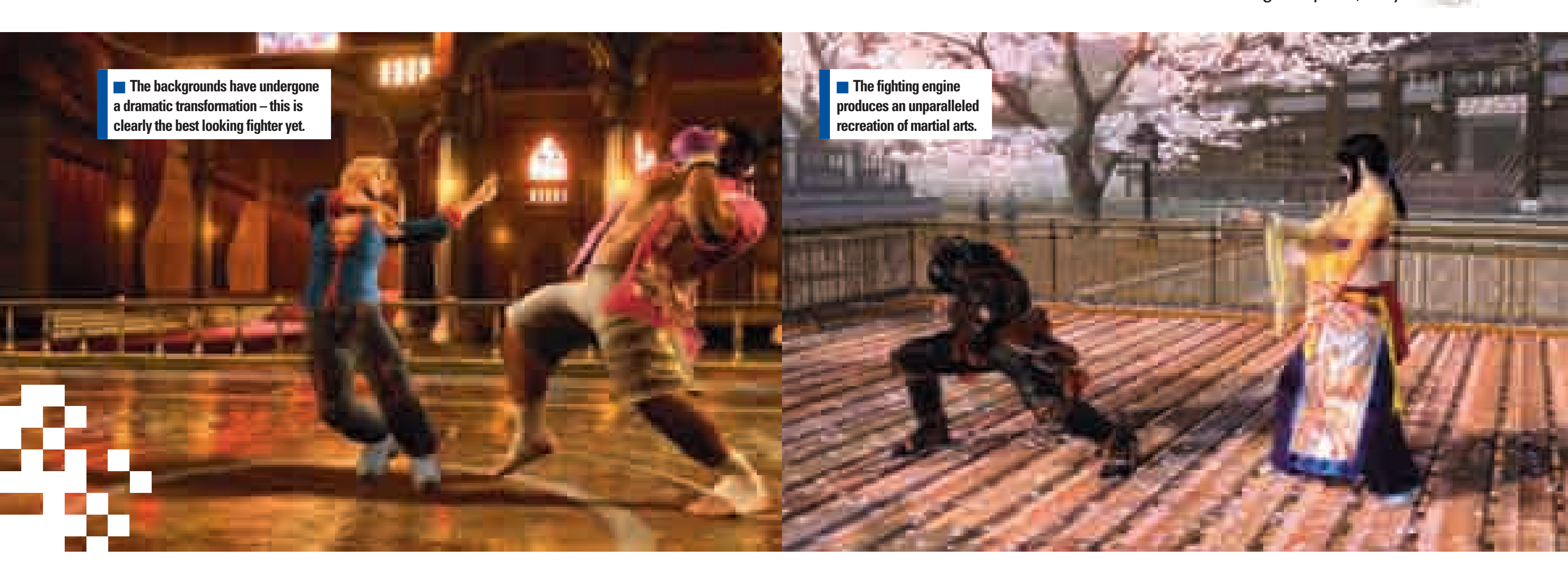
Luchadores have adorned other fighting games in the past – *DOA4*'s La Mariposa, for example – but until now they have been a showcase for flashy moves and little else. *Virtua Fighter 5* will allow players to get into the mindset of a Luchador – outwitting and outpacing opponents at every step, using high-risk moves to gain advantages in situations where other characters could not. We look forward to bouts between Wolf and El Blaze – it will be akin to a Kurt Angle/ Rey Mysterio match-up. Only real.

Of course, the old favourites haven't been ignored. Aside from a stunning graphical makeover, thanks to the power of the new Lindbergh arcade system (or the cell processor, depending on your platform of choice), every character from the series' history returns with expanded move sets and access to a new 'offensive move' attack, which is very similar to *Virtua Fighter 3*'s evade but with an emphasis on the counter-strike. It may seem like a minor adjustment, but the offensive move has the power to completely reshape the *Virtua Fighter* experience. When dealing with a fighting engine this precise and refined, any alteration automatically has a huge effect on gameplay. It will be interesting to see how the *Virtua Fighter* masters react to the change.

There's no denying we're itching to dive headfirst into everything *Virtua Fighter 5* has to offer. The home version may not be coming till early next year, but be in no doubt that there will be many **games™** outings to the local arcade when *Virtua Fighter 5* arrives. Just no using cheap Lau, okay?

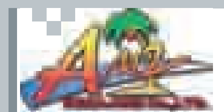
COSTUME PARTY

As is becoming a norm for the genre, *Virtua Fighter 5* features fully customisable clothing for its combatants, and a host of unlockable extras for players to hunt down. This adds longevity to the single-player, but the fact that players can create a unique Kage or Jeffry and then take them into the multi-player arena is far more important. We remember decking *VF4*'s Lion out in an ugly jacket and a baseball cap just to further enhance his annoying charm. *Virtua Fighter 5* promises more clothing options than ever before, so start working out which Lucha Libre masks or combat trousers you fancy.



The backgrounds have undergone a dramatic transformation – this is clearly the best looking fighter yet.

The fighting engine produces an unparalleled recreation of martial arts.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

AM2 is one of only two remaining independent Sega studios (the other being Sonic Team), and is responsible for numerous arcade treasures spanning the last two decades. *OutRun, Space Harrier, Virtua Racing* and of course *Virtua Fighter* were all conceived in this legendary studio.

HISTORY

- **VIRTUA FIGHTER 4** 1996 [Arcade]
- **VIRTUA RACING** 1992 [Arcade]
- **OUTRUN** 1986 [Arcade]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FIGHTING TALK

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4 + ULTIMO DRAGON – PLAYSTATION3 = VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

"FOR YEARS, THE INDUSTRY HAS TALKED ABOUT BRINGING THE ARCADE EXPERIENCE TO THE LIVING ROOM. VIRTUA FIGHTER 5 FULFILLS THIS PROMISE, AND THEN SOME"

SCOTT A STEINBERG, SEGA OF AMERICA VP OF MARKETING



Virtua Fighter in 720p? Yes, thank you very much.

INDIANA JONES 2007

Jones' trusty whip is put to good use throughout, disabling limbs and disarming assailants.

"INDIANA JONES RETURNS FOR HIS MOST INCREDIBLE INTERACTIVE EXPEDITION EVER"
LUCASARTS, PRESS RELEASE

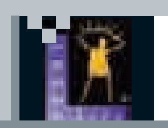
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CALLING DR JONES

TOMB RAIDER + FIGHTING x HATS = INDIANA JONES 2007



The fistfights capture the 'down and dirty' quality of the movies.

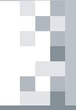


DEVELOPER PROFILE

LucasArts is responsible for the 8.2 million *Star Wars*-branded games that have graced the videogames industry since the dawn of time. The firm continues to be one of the richest publisher/developers in the industry and, unless *Star Wars* goes out of fashion, will remain so.

HISTORY

- **STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT 2** 2005 [Multi]
- **STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT** 2004 [Multi]
- **X-WING** 1993 [PC]



HEY, DR JONES, NO TIME FOR LOVE

It happens every year. At every single E3, developers tout their latest technological buzzword as if it were the Holy Grail of videogaming; as if somehow volumetric fog is going to change the landscape of the industry. *Indiana Jones 2007*, the first product to come from LucasArts' internal development machine in quite some time, has another word to add to the gaming dictionary: Euphoria. Not neccessarily the first word that springs to mind when thinking about the life and times of the hatted hero of three of Hollywood's greatest ever adventures, but 'euphoria' it is. And what is this Euphoria of which we speak? Well, it's ragdoll physics, of course. Ragdoll physics 2007, that is.

From our brief demo at this year's E3, Euphoria – the handiwork of tech company NaturalMotion – may well shape the future of third-person action games. It's all based around behavioural AI, so characters use the advanced ragdoll physics to react to the world around them as if they're completely unscripted. Which they are. A confusing concept, no doubt, and one best explained with examples.

During a very faithful-to-the-movies fistfight in 1930s Chinatown, Indy makes quick work of a number of assailants, using typically brash right hooks, high knees and a couple of headbutts. Nothing new there, you might say, but it's the enemies' reactions that make for interesting viewing. You will never bear witness to the same fall twice, as enemies flail, crumple and bend entirely relatively to what's around. A minuscule change in momentum or angle will lead to a completely unique animation. While this sounds exactly like the ragdoll we've become accustomed to, the fact that this same theory applies when characters are still conscious makes Euphoria the genuine progression it claims to be.

While scrapping atop a San Francisco tram, enemies will react entirely realistically to every bump in the road. Every misplaced step on the train's roof will lead to a frantic scramble for balance. A falling enemy will clutch dramatically for the edge in an attempt not to fall. Sometimes they'll make it and pull themselves back up. Sometimes they won't. Then they die. It's unpredictable. Organic. Real. It's what could turn *Indiana Jones 2007* from a generic third-person action game into a really exciting prospect.

It's not only the enemies that tumble around realistically. Scenery is just as prone to shatter, crack or crumble beneath the strain of a flying body or a stray bullet, so Indy will make good use of the surroundings to turn a potentially overwhelming situation to his advantage. He also has full access to his trusty whip which can be utilised in all manner of ways, including, most satisfyingly, disarming enemies or incapacitating a limb.

It's all looking highly entertaining, but despite the pugilistic frivolity the lack of actual adventuring was conspicuous. LucasArts is promising a "mystery of biblical proportions", so we can expect more *Last Crusade/Raiders*-style japery, and the news that the game will allow players to visit "the world's most sacred grounds" summons countless images of Ms Croft and her tomb raiding endeavours. If that whip isn't used to swing across at least one gap, we'll be amazed and thoroughly disappointed.

As the quite uninspiring title suggests, *Indiana Jones 2007* is still some way off, however, as a showcase for the advances made in technology and the potential of the next generation of action games, it's already looking pretty exciting. Expect to don that familiar fedora once again come next year.



"AS A SHOWCASE FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY AND THE POTENTIAL OF NEXT-GENERATION ACTION GAMES, IT'S ALREADY RATHER EXCITING"

The ragdoll physics in *Indiana Jones 2007* make for some highly amusing falls.

STORYTELLING

The bearded one himself, Mr George Lucas, has taken a much more hands on approach to *Indiana Jones 2007* than he has with previous *Indy* titles; directing the scriptwriting process and other ambiguous methods of improving the game. Set in 1939 (and not 2007), Jones' new adventure takes place just one year on from *The Last Crusade*, at the time when the Nazis were planning their assault on Europe. In a dream world, Sean Connery will be a playable character. In the real world, he'll probably just be included for comic relief and given a weak soundalike dub. Still, we can hope…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PlayStation3
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 2007
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

A return for everyone's favourite fedora-topped action hero, with incredible physics and one hell of a lot of punching.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS



Swordplay is touch based; drawing little circles induces Link's trademark spin attack.

Plotting a course is done beforehand by drawing a route onto a map – during the journey, the stylus controls cannons.

> **"THE EPIC STORY OF WIND WAKER CONTINUES AS LINK FINDS HIMSELF LOST AND ALONE IN UNKNOWN SEAS"**
> *NINTENDO PRESS RELEASE*

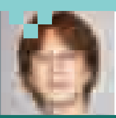
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ALL AT SEA

THE WIND WAKER x NINTENDO DS – WIND BATON = PHANTOM HOURGLASS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

NINTENDO DS



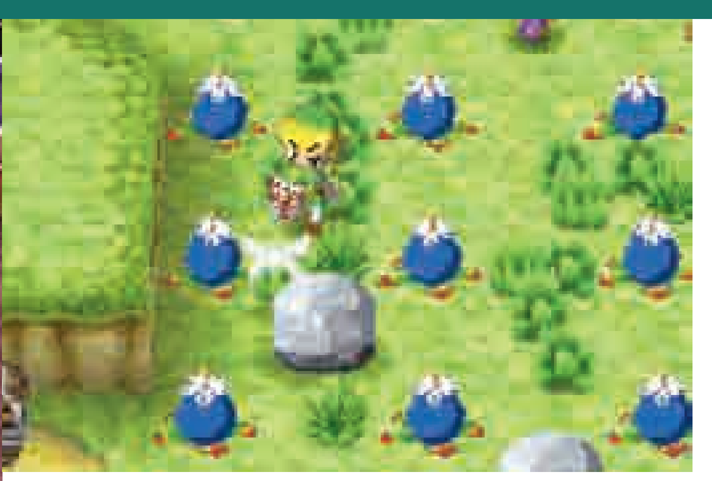
DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ **Shigeru Miyamoto created *Zelda*, but since *Ocarina Of Time* it's been influenced by another man, Eiji Aonuma. The first DS *Zelda* title was planned to be a *Four Swords* game, but Aonuma had the chance to revive *Wind Waker*, so he chose to do that. He hopes that the control scheme in *Phantom Hourglass* will be used by subsequent *Zelda* titles.**

HISTORY

■ **ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER** 2003 [GC]
■ **ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME** 1999 [N64]
■ **MARVELOUS** 1993 [SNES]







■ Pushing blocks and other interactions are all touch based, making this game quite leisurely.

"SAILING ON THE SEVEN SEAS SO BLUE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ Setting the tone for DS *Zelda* adventures, *Phantom Hourglass* evolves the concepts of *The Wind Waker* with the DS's touch screen.

Words can't express how much we loved *The Wind Waker*. We were among the sceptics when the new style was revealed all those years ago, but the game's sublime vibrancy conveyed the spirit of *Zelda* games far better than *Ocarina Of Time*'s rough polygonal realism. We'd be willing to bet that, like *Okami*, it will look as wonderful in ten years as it did the first day we saw it in motion. By simplifying its style it created perfect graphical consistency, never once showing up the technological limitations of its host platform. It delivered an entirely coherent, believable, living and breathing, colourful world that greatly benefited from a style and setting that was substantially different from the Hyrule of the series' past; in many ways, we actually preferred it.

The Wind Waker was three years ago now, and we've been waiting all that time for a new *Zelda* game. *Four Swords* did a lot to ease the pain, but *The Minish Cap* just wasn't the same. Now that *Phantom Hourglass* is on the horizon, we know that the brilliant characters and unique atmosphere of *Wind Waker*'s flooded, post-Hyrule world are not left to fade into obscurity. *Phantom Hourglass* sees the return of Tetra and the young Hero of the Winds as they set out for distant lands just months after the events of *The Wind Waker*, growing bored of peaceful times. In stark contrast to *Link To The Past*'s oppressed dimension-hopper and *Ocarina Of Time*/*Majora's Mask*'s troubled post-apocalyptic hero, *The Wind Waker*'s Link is still hungry for adventure, and Tetra has also put her royal heritage behind her and returned to a pirate's life. The game's premise actually reminds us of Game Boy's surreal adventure, *Link's Awakening: Ballad Of The Wind Fish*. Caught in a fog out at sea, the pair encounter a mysterious ship which Tetra decides to investigate. Things don't go well, though, and Link falls into the sea while trying to rescue her, leaving him washed up and unconscious on an uncharted island. With the help of a strange fairy, he embarks upon a quest to find Tetra and take her back to familiar seas.

> "THIS IS TO BE A FULLY FLEDGED ZELDA GAME WITH ALL THE OPPRESSIVE DUNGEONS, BUSTLING ISLANDS AND OPEN SEAS OF ITS GAMECUBE PREDECESSOR"

This will be a fully fledged *Zelda* game with all the oppressive dungeons, bustling islands and open seas of its Cube predecessor. DS, of course, allows for the introduction of a variety of ideas that would not have been possible a few years ago, including the inspired ability to annotate maps (which any directionally challenged *Zelda* fan will appreciate). Link is controlled entirely with the stylus for both movement and combat – sweeping motions with the stylus control swordplay, rather like *Twilight Princess'* sweeping arm movements. All together it makes for a leisurely feel – this is intended to be an accessible handheld *Zelda*, one that can be played by veterans as well as those new to the series. The hourglass itself actually lets Link turn back time, in a continuation of the *Zelda* series' tradition of temporal manipulation, giving him more time to get to Tetra before some ill befalls her.

We think keeping *Wind Waker*'s style and spirit is the right way to go, especially for handheld *Zelda* titles. *Phantom Hourglass* is looking set for release around the same time as *Twilight Princess*, but for us at least, it might just steal a little of the higher-profile game's thunder.

ZELDA: TWO SWORDS

***Phantom Hourglass*, unlike any other *Zelda* title bar *Four Swords*, will feature a multi-player option. Supporting only two players, one takes control of Link in a *Four Swords*-esque rush for Force Gems, while the other controls the enemy hordes in an effort to block him off. It seems that the multi-player arenas will be mazes, meaning that the player in charge of the opposing forces will have to send different monsters in different directions in order to trap and corner Link who will have to run about avoiding them *Pac-Man*-style. If it turns out to be anything like *Pac-Man Vs* (a Pac-Man multi-player game designed by Shigeru Miyamoto for Namco, wherein three players play ghosts and one plays Pac-Man), it could turn out most entertaining.**

SADNESS

HOMAGE TO PRE-WAR SILENT CINEMA? THE QUEUE STARTS HERE…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo Wii
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: Nibris
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ Either pretentious or genius, *Sadness* is an attempt to capture the mood of a silent psychological horror.

As continual observers of videogames, we find it hard to shake the impression that the industry has a decidedly one-track mind. Professional integrity makes us strive to avoid sounding like a stuck record, but with developers always plumbing the same depths in their quest for originality, that can be a chore. For years now the prime example has been videogames' inferiority complex with regards to cinema. Every time it feels safe to move on, another game arrives bellowing its filmic heritage from the rooftops.

The problem is compounded further by the uniformity they display; rather than cribbing from cinema's entire pantheon, developers seem content sticking to the works of Michael Bay, John Woo and other selected genre hacks. Overwrought plots and hyper-stylised action do not represent the pinnacle of filmic achievement, yet this is precisely where game developers look to raise the bar for their own medium.

Sadness promises to be different. Touted as the first black-and-white game, the emerging screenshots saw it labelled as being under the influence of *Sin City* – a claim quickly rubbished by Nibris as the work of gamers trying to place *Sadness* in a context they understood. Indeed, *Sin City* is precisely the sort of hollow, pyrotechnic nonsense so readily plagiarised by the industry. *Sadness* is looking to achieve something very different.

The story takes place before the First World War in the Ukraine, and will be a tribute to the cinema of the era. It's safe to assume that the average gamer has limited knowledge of German Expressionist film – making the *Sin City* parallel quite understandable – but Nibris seems to be drawing the majority of its thematic influence from that source. *Sadness* will sideline action for atmosphere, exploring illnesses like schizophrenia and narcolepsy, while also ruminating on the nature of unhappiness. The war was a benchmark in the development of European society – modernism and psychoanalysis were born in the aftermath – and Nibris wishes to explore the repressed psyche of those who lived before its advent.



■ This is Maria. You will be able to choose to play as her or as another mystery character.

"SADNESS WILL SIDELINE ACTION FOR ATMOSPHERE, EXPLORING ILLNESSES LIKE SCHIZOPHRENIA AND NARCOLEPSY"

Rare is the occasion when such ambition can be attributed to a game, but *Sadness'* trailer is a poor attempt to whet the appetite. A woman uses the Wiimote to control Maria, one of two playable characters, allowing her to cast a rope over a hook, ward off rats with a flaming torch and slit a silhouetted stranger's throat – these ideas demonstrate the low production values and hokey theatrics associated with the worst of silent cinema – not the best. If *Sadness* is aiming to break free of games' tendency to borrow only the most visceral and clichéd elements of cinema, Nibris will need more persuasive evidence than this.



■ Evidently, poking rats with a burning stick will be one possible use.


eMag

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL



It may be a lie, but accuracy actually rises by 34 per cent for every 16 degrees the camera tilts.

Pipes. Diseased areas hate them. We like them.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

IN THE ZONE

FEAR + DISEASE × AGES = S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

"SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL IS WELL POSITIONED TO RE-DEFINE FPS GAMING"

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. PRESS RELEASE

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL
PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE
■ GSC Game World was founded in 1995 in Kiev. Until 1997 the studio was involved in the creation of multimedia encyclopaedias and edutainment programs, but from then on the company put its efforts purely into game technology and development. This resulted in its first commercial project, *Cossacks: European Wars*.

HISTORY
- **HOVER ACE** 2003 [PC]
- **AMERICAN CONQUEST** 2003 [PC]
- **CODENAME: OUTBREAK** 2001 [PC]

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER?



FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Ukraine
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: GSC Game World
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA



■ An explosion at a power plant has resulted in an area of disease known simply as 'The Zone'. You are one of the few brave enough to explore the place.

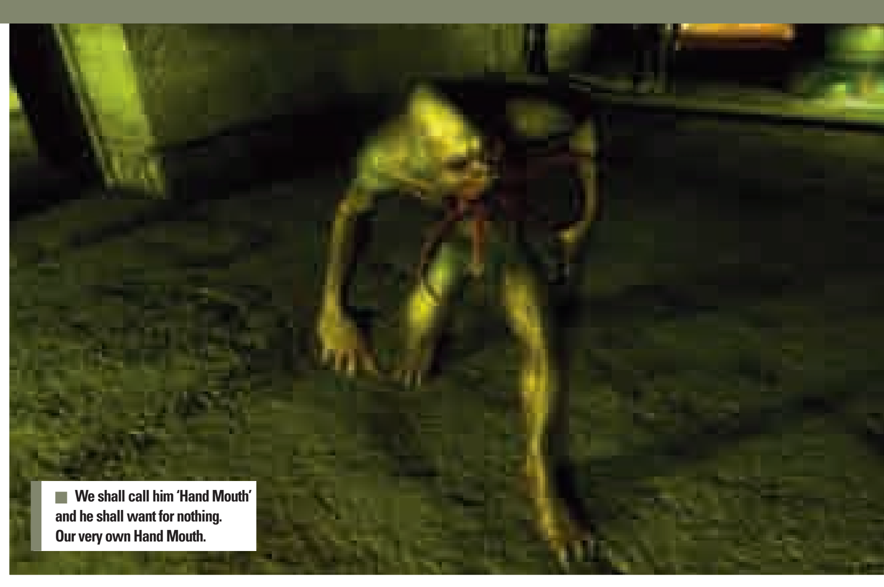
The phrase 'change is good', is one that evokes various emotions in people who hear it. One of the most likely of these emotions is disgust – disgust at the ferocity of the lie that has just soiled their ears. Many believe that change is, in fact, a very, very bad thing. Unfortunately for these people, change is unavoidable when large periods of time are involved, and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* has been subject to more time than the vast majority of videogames ever have or will.

It's four years since we first heard the plans for the game, and it was something that many got very excited about. Put simply: much was promised. We were told to look forward to a game experience like no other. There would be eating, sleeping and plenty of other RPG elements, a superb plot, plenty of frantic FPS action… At the time, it all sounded too good to be true. It was. The title dropped off the radar after the nth 'release date' passed by, and many assumed it to have died its final death. It would have been an elaborate death that made use of physics and gameplay elements not previously seen before, no doubt.

No, it was not to be, and no final death was died. The title is back again. You've probably heard this before and doubted its truthfulness. THQ has come to the rescue, and now, with a THQ producer on board, changes have been made: the team is hitting targets and a release is expected in the not-too-distant future.

After hearing so much about the progress of the game during the early years of its creation, it was nice to finally see it in playable form, although, as we mentioned, there have been changes. Many of the aspects that were causing the aforementioned stir seem to have been dropped and a few don't seem quite as impressive as they once did.

DRIVE BY?
Another question that's been raised with regard to *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl* is the inclusion of vehicles. It was always intended to feature various modes of transportation in the beginning, but it seems the decision to include vehicles is still in progress. Whereas we all know that it's perfectly viable to have a quality FPS with no vehicles whatsoever, if they're opted out it's likely to have serious scale issues and we could well see the game getting smaller – bad news as another of the early selling points was the size of the game map.



■ We shall call him 'Hand Mouth' and he shall want for nothing. Our very own Hand Mouth.



■ We're betting this guy will be dead within minutes. We'll shoot him ourselves if we need to.

"THE RPG ELEMENTS HAVE BEEN SHUNNED IN FAVOUR OF MORE FOCUS ON THE ACTION"

It seems the RPG elements have been shunned in favour of more focus on the action, and the open world now looks to be a little more scripted, with events driving the story but still allowing flexibility and choice.

In many ways, it may seem as if the title has been streamlined too much to appeal, but there's still enough on offer to excite, and now the team is actually making decisions and focusing, rather than attempting to present a project that, even by today's standards, would be ambitious. It's looking certain that the game will actually make it out of the studio and into our homes – far better than reaching for the unobtainable in our view.

However, the masses are likely to take this news badly. Without the features that were going to set the title apart, many will question its relevance. Although it's certainly looking superb visually, it's now rivalling other FPSs in a very real way – and this is a genre that's seen a lot of quality over the last year. Unless *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* finds a new way to appeal, it could well fall on its face undeservedly. After all, the tale of its four years in development and the ramblings of those who've followed from the start will only take it so far, possibly leading to its downfall. By now we all know the dangers of over hyping. Four years will do that to you…

GOD HAND

THE WORLD'S FIRST DIEGO MARADONA SIMULATOR

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

A bizarre beat-'em-up from the mind behind *Devil May Cry* and *Onimusha*, featuring an all-singing, all-dancing hero with a violent point to prove.

Gamers seem to be more receptive to the unusual than fans of other media. Perhaps it's the bizarre origins of the form – *Manic Miner*, *Chuckie Egg* et al – or maybe the innate sense of fun that most players possess. Whatever the reason, the odd, bizarre and wacky seem to go down far better in gaming circles than they do elsewhere. This goes some way to explain our relative lack of surprise when we were introduced to Clover Studio's latest project: the truly off-the-wall *God Hand*.

Set in a vision of the Wild West, warped by an overactive Japanese imagination, *God Hand* tells the story of a drifter known as Gene. After losing a scuffle to save a woman from a vicious mob, he wakes to find his arm severed, and replaced with the almighty 'God Hand'. The appendage in question contains the raw power of the demon Angra, and bestows immense strength on anyone who is attached to it. Good news for Gene, then.

God Hand's premise is supremely simple; it's Gene versus the world in hand-to-hand combat. It plays very much like a traditional scrolling beat-'em-up: encounter a group of enemies, and dispatch them as efficiently as possible. Using just two buttons, the game has a surprising range of moves, most of which involve smashing a foe hundreds of yards back through scenery, debris and even, on occasion, over the horizon. *God Hand* is certainly not pushing toward the realistic martial arts market.

> "IMAGINE THE HAPPINESS OF THE KATAKURIS MIXED WITH FIST OF THE NORTH STAR, AND YOU'LL UNDERSTAND GOD HAND"

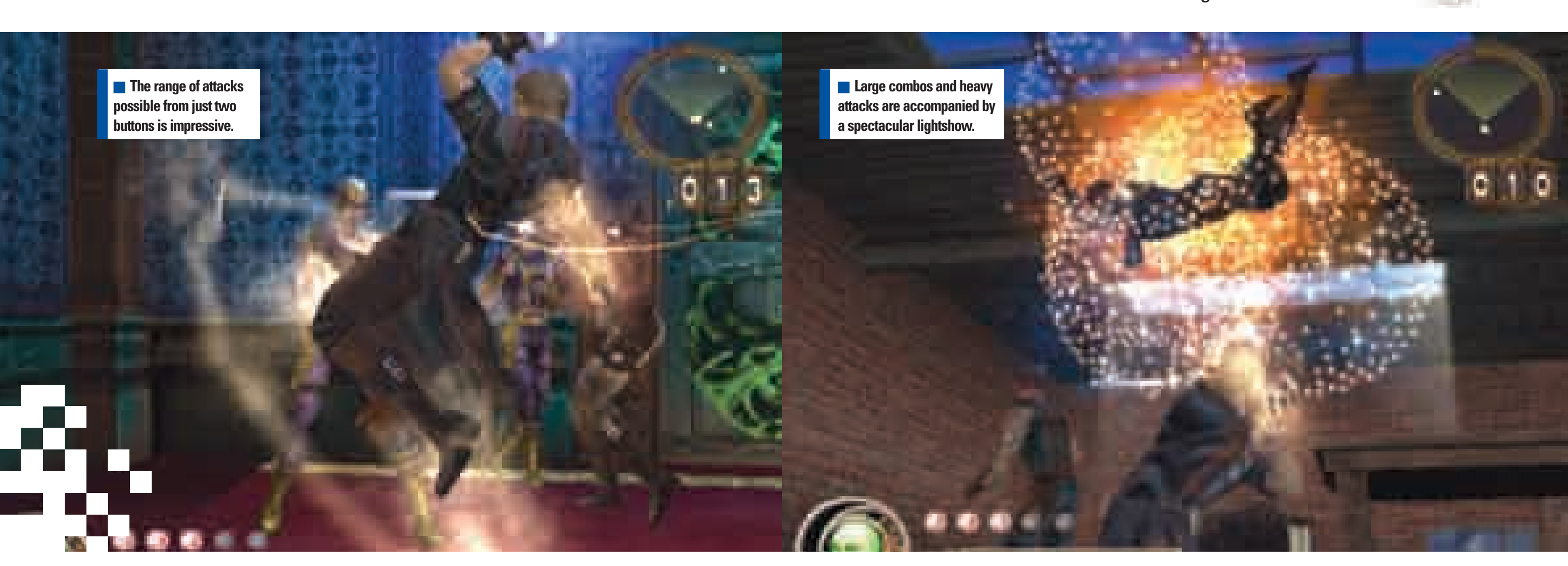
The "wackiness" (for want of a less ugly term) doesn't stop there. Every character not directly involved in a fight can be seen dancing to the oddball surf/western music. No reason is given (at least not from our brief demo), no questions are asked, everyone simply… dances. Imagine *The Happiness Of The Katakuris* mixed with *Fist Of The North Star*, and you'll go some way to understanding *God Hand's* thoroughly unusual blend of humour and combat. With a laughter track, truly odd characters and a plotline that makes *Akira* seem like *Eastenders*, *God Hand* is certainly not one for the *Need For Speed Underground* crowd – a point compounded by the game's potentially impenetrable difficultly level.

Being a Capcom product, many would have expected this anyway, but if *Devil May Cry* and *Viewtiful Joe* were too tricky for your specific taste, then it's more than likely that *God Hand* will be too. Sporting the motto 'hard but fair' and featuring combos that stretch far into treble figures, this is not a beat-'em-up for the lighthearted. Which is exactly how we like them. *God Hand* looks set to slot in nicely to the 'dojo' school of action-adventure games, joining forces with the aforementioned *DMC*, and *Ninja Gaiden* and laughing raucously at those lacking the necessary skills. Good stuff.

With a unique art style, a colossal amount of invention and a strong development pedigree behind it, there's no reason why *God Hand* can't join in with the PS2's last-hurrah-brigade (*Okami*, *God Of War II*) when it arrives later in the year. Repetition is a concern as always with this type of game, but we have faith in Capcom's ability to hold the player's interest throughout a ten-hour adventure – *Resident Evil 4* could have been a very samey game in different hands – and with Inaba and Mikami onboard, *God Hand* should be a resounding success.

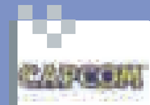
HAND OF GOD

Gene's ability to viciously dispatch enemies is replicated by the controls. Using two buttons, it's possible to punch, kick, headbutt and generally brutalise anyone who comes within ten feet of Gene and his all-powerful hands. Players are free to express themselves through emphatic and stylish combos – á là Dante – and with multiple juggles, taunts and charged attacks, skilled 'God Handers' will be able to pull off some very impressive attacks. It's even possible to unleash a 100-hit knee-to-the-face combo if your hand-speed and concentration are up to it. Whether the combat will have the depth and long-term appeal of *Devil May Cry* is another matter.



The range of attacks possible from just two buttons is impressive.

Large combos and heavy attacks are accompanied by a spectacular lightshow.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ What more can be said about Capcom that hasn't already been said? Widely heralded as one of the finest developer/publishers in the world – responsible for the likes of *Resident Evil, Devil May Cry* and *Street Fighter II* to name but three – and consistent in its output of high-calibre software.

HISTORY



- **ONIMUSHA** 2001 [Multi]
- **DEVIL MAY CRY** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **RESIDENT EVIL** 1996 [PSOne]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HANDS UP

DEVIL MAY CRY – DANTE x SINGING = GOD HAND

■ Gene's incredible power allows him to send enemies flying into the distance, through scenery and even over the horizon.

"DISINTEGRATE EVERY ENEMY INTO THE VERY DUST THAT BLOWS THROUGH THE TOWN"

CAPCOM, PRESS RELEASE

■ Forget 'Hand of God'. We like to call this move the 'Foot of God'. Ouchie!

SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE

"CAN'T THINK OF A REASON NOT TO…"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: GameTap
DEVELOPER: Telltale Games
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Point-N-Click
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

The very long-awaited return of everyone's favourite dog and rabbit freelance police mammals, delivered direct to your PC episodically via GameTap.

Are there two more likeable characters in the universe than Sam and Max? The maniacal rabbit and cynical dog detectives, born from the mind of illustrator Steve Purcell, have found success across many mediums. These include comics, a highly irreverent television series and, of course, 1993's superb *Sam & Max Hit The Road*, one of LucasArts' finest ever point-n-click adventures.

For over a decade fans have been clamouring for the elusive sequel that was rumoured in the media, and they thought they had it until last year when LucasArts announced an Xbox and PC follow-up. Hopes were dashed however, when the project was canned and it looked, for all intents and purposes, like the freelance police would never grace another videogame.

Step forward Telltale Games who, after finding a modicum of success with youngsters' adventure *Bone*, has rescued Sam and Max from oblivion and resurrected their law-enforcement career. As with *Bone*, the new adventure, subtitled *Freelance Police*, will appear episodically via website GameTap, with the first instalment due this autumn. Details of the story are thin on the ground, but fear not, it will be a point-n-click in the classic style, with the familiar mix of cynical, irreverent humour, pop-culture satire and out-and-out surrealism. A collective sigh of relief there then.



The office where it all happens – if by 'all' you mean 'the intro sequence', that is.

As it stands, the most interesting aspect of *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* is its structure – episodic delivery means that the story will have to be broken up into bite-size chunks. It's something that's becoming increasingly fashionable in gaming, with *SiN Episodes* and *Half-Life 2* offering a similar service. It will be interesting to see how the game is marketed upon release. We at **games™** would rather see the entire game released at once, but if it means a steadier revenue stream for GameTap, then we can't really complain. After all, without Telltale and GameTap, Sam and Max would be no more, and the world would be a far gloomier place.

Suffice to say, we're very excited about the prospect of investigating the weird and wonderful underbelly of America with Sam and Max once more. If *Freelance Police* can retain the original game's mockery of Middle America – and a general sense of mayhem and chaos – then we should be on to a winner. If not, then it will be yet another example of a franchise's good name being dragged through the mud for a cheap buck. Surely everyone hopes it will not be the latter.

"THE FAMILIAR MIX OF CYNICAL, IRREVERENT HUMOUR, POP-CULTURE SATIRE AND OUT-AND-OUT SURREALISM"



If only real life was this much fun. The more Maxes the better, we say.



Expect the same surreal humour that has been the mainstay of the comics for years.


eMag

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG



■ Do we really need any more *Sonic* characters? Oh well, at least Silver actually looks good. Unlike Storm the bloody Albatross or whatever he was.

"BY HARNESSING THE POWER OF THESE NEW PLATFORMS, WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT SONIC WILL ONCE AGAIN RAISE THE BAR FOR ACTION GAMING"
NAOYA TSURUMI, SEGA OF AMERICA CEO

■ Note how Sonic is always running AWAY from danger. What a hero!

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SUPER SONIC

SONIC ADVENTURE 2: BATTLE x 3X SPEED + THIN EGGMAN = SONIC THE HEDGEHOG



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ So many words about Sonic Team have been written in this little box that it's somewhat hard to know what new information can be offered. Yuji Naka recently left Sonic Team to form his own studio, but is apparently still acting as an advisor. Prior to his departure, he was instrumental in its initial design.

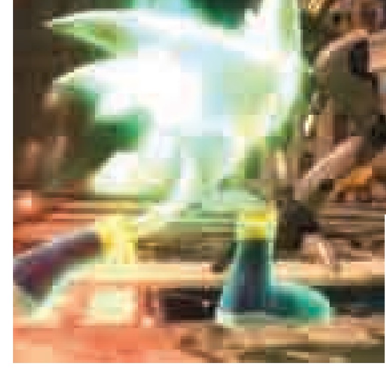
HISTORY

- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG** 1991 [Genesis]
- **CHU CHU ROCKET** 2000 [Dreamcast]
- **ASTRO BOY** 2004 [PlayStation2]





■ Falling through tiers of a level due to a missed jump is most dispiriting.



■ Can robot baddies avoid looking generic? Seemingly not.

GET UP TO SPEED

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Platformer
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Sonic goes back to his roots. Huge multi-tiered levels, blistering speeds and an all-new character combine to make this a fitting Sonic evolution.

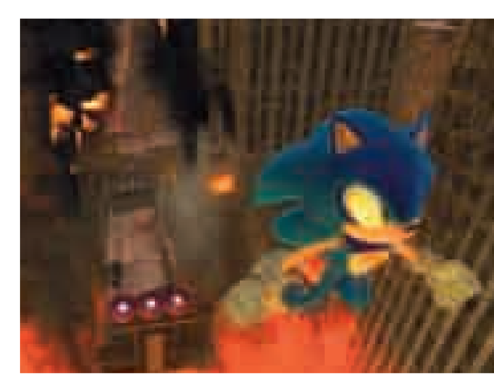
PS3 **With the memory of *Sonic Riders* still fresh in our heads, it was with considerable trepidation that we embarked upon our hands-on sampling of the new *Sonic The Hedgehog*.** Although our time with the game was brief, it did much to allay our fears. Timed to coincide with Sonic's 15th birthday this year, this is a return-to-roots of what it was that gave Sonic's first games such a wide appeal – speed, great multi-tiered level design and stunning visuals.

The setting and characters have undergone quite a transformation for this next-generation entry in the series. Most notably, Dr Robotnik (we still don't like to call him Eggman) has been on a diet and looks much more nefarious than before. Eggman's role has shifted from villain to comic relief in the last decade and a half, but it looks as if *Sonic The Hedgehog* might redress that balance and put him squarely back in the shoes of the evil mastermind.

Sonic also looks a little different – the hairstyle has changed and his legs are longer, making his overall appearance more stylised – presumably an attempt to get away from the kiddie image that the *Sonic* series has recently begun to accrue. Shadow the Hedgehog also makes a very brief appearance in the game's trailer, with the same stylistic adaptations; but we know that Shadow will not be a significant playable character in the game – instead, a new character will take Sonic's place as the hero for certain sections of the game.

> "THE GAME LOOKS INCREDIBLE EVEN AT THE BREAKNECK SPEEDS ON SHOW"

Silver the Hedgehog is an entirely new playable creature whose telekinetic powers make for more puzzling and intricate platforming than Sonic's speed-based levels. Combat-wise, he can throw objects at enemies with the power of his mind and stop bullets before throwing them back at their source, but Silver's ability to hover and move platforms will be most useful. His levels are slower-paced and place more emphasis upon finding the hidden paths and areas within the levels as opposed to rocketing through them at ridiculous speed.



Sonic's levels play much like *Sonic Adventure 2: Battle* at three times the pace. The game looks incredible even at speed; the level we played saw Sonic running up walls of water and soaring between stone platforms as an entire landscape unfolded beneath him. The levels were populated by robotic enemies, which Sonic approached with a familiar homing strike attack that is no different from that used in previous 3D Sonic games, although it looks a little more powerful. There were also plenty of alternate routes through the levels (see Hidden Treasures), but they were certainly hard to spot at high speed.

Of all the classic videogame series of the Nineties, *Sonic The Hedgehog's* transition to three dimensions has been one of the most difficult. Where the 2D titles have been met with consistently high praise, there has yet to be a 3D instalment to inspire such critical acclaim. This new *Sonic The Hedgehog* attempts to buck that trend with a game that both honours Sonic's origins and takes him in a new direction. We're looking forward to seeing finished code like you wouldn't imagine.

HIDDEN TREASURES

The levels are multi-tiered, like those of the early 2D Sonic games and the more recent *Sonic Rush*. In the version we played, green orbs that could be destroyed by Sonic's homing attack often indicated alternate routes or hidden areas. We saw grindable wind routes not unlike the turbulence from *Sonic Riders*, and the series' trademark rails, hoops and boost pads also often led to hidden areas. Silver's levels, being somewhat more leisurely, were easier to explore – anything with a glowing green crest could be manipulated by his telekinetic powers, making platforms move revealing hidden bits of levels. The only problem was that it was pretty much impossible to take sufficient notice of the surroundings at the speeds that Sonic now runs at, meaning that exploration might be more challenging than expected.

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS



EA promises fast and frenetic combat, with *C&C*'s original Side menu making a welcome return.

EA MAKES AMENDS FOR THE PAST

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA 2007
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

A classic franchise, revived and restored to its former glory. Well, hopefully.

"IF NARRATIVE IS ELECTRONIC ARTS' CHIEF CONCERN, IT HASN'T ALLOWED IT TO EFFECT THE QUALITY OF THE VISUALS"

The common consensus in videogames is often dictated by whose opinions are shouted loudest. Over the last year there has been a growing din surrounding the industry's ever-increasing use of plot and cut-scenes. Linked in no small part to the burgeoning retro market, this nostalgic furore has reached such a pitch that it's easy to forget the abundance of people out there who would gladly take Master Chief over Mario, who feel that the emergence of advanced narrative techniques elevated gaming to a new and altogether better level.

Metal Gear Solid and *Halo* boast legions of fans as devoted to the story as to the game itself, and although it's a far less obvious example, so too does *Command & Conquer*. EA discovered this soon after buying out the series' creator, Westwood Studios, when it pushed aside the developing plotline – seen in *C&C: Tiberian Sun*, which involved a war between the Global Defence Initiative (GDI) and the Brotherhood Of Nod (NOD) over the mysterious substance Tiberium – to release a string of games that did nothing to deepen the *C&C* mythology. Fans greeted the games coldly, and the change in tone and content was seen as evidence that EA didn't understand what Westwood Studios was trying to achieve.

As if trying to redress the balance, EA has announced that the next instalment will revisit and significantly advance the Tiberium plot, with executive producer Mike Verdu going so far as to claim that *Tiberium Wars* will be, "a landmark in terms of story". Set in 2047, Earth has been ravaged by the alien crystal Tiberium, a parasite that mutates everything around it. The heroic GDI is determined to stem the spread of the substance, but the altogether more corrupt NOD has discovered its potential use as an energy source. The game sees the GDI on the back foot after a calamitous NOD attack on its orbiting station The Philadelphia. With severely depleted resources and slowly dwindling morale, GDI must rally the troops for another assault on NOD before it has a chance to consolidate its position. Fans of *C&C* are promised story details and references in every facet of the game – from mission briefings to battlefield conversations – and the return of FMV cut-scenes suggest that there will be major plot revelations between missions.

If narrative is EA's chief concern, it hasn't allowed it to effect the quality of the visuals. The world is broken up into three sections, differentiated by the severity of Tiberium infestation. Red zones are uninhabitable deserts; Yellow zones are controlled by NOD and show the beginnings of Tiberium growth; and Blue zones are safe, GDI controlled areas. Each zone has its own distinct look, lighting and weather conditions, with the impressive particle effects creating ion storms, exploding buildings and swirling dust trails with equal aplomb.

The series' established fan base will be delighted with the emphasis on broadening the fiction, but it could also serve to alienate those not well versed in the previous instalments. The escalating complexity of *Metal Gear Solid* is a similarly double-edged sword for virgins of the franchise, but *C&C* lacks the astronomical profile that continues to attract newcomers to Kojima's masterwork. EA has indicated that the combat will be fast enough to eradicate familiarity with the story as an issue, but the imminent arrival of such high-end strategy titles as *Supreme Commander*, *Company Of Heroes* and *Joint Task Force* will leave genre fans with reason enough to look elsewhere.

FORGETTING SOMETHING?

Rumours are rife that once both the GDI and NOD campaigns are completed you'll be able to play as a surprise third faction. Who this will be is still secret, but a pretty smart bet would be The Forgotten, a race that first appeared in *Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun*. Mutated by continued exposure to Tiberium, The Forgotten is reviled by NOD, but is united with GDI in their common goal to stop the spread of the cancerous alien substance. Its inclusion would be entirely in keeping with *Tiberium Wars'* commitment to referencing past titles.





Some areas of the Earth are not affected by the spread of Tiberium, and remain inhabited.

COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Westwood Studios originated the *Command & Conquer* series in 1995. The developer was taken over by Electronic Arts in 1998, with the majority of Westwood staff leaving over the next few years. EA produced two new instalments for the franchise, but none lived up to fans' expectations.

HISTORY

■ COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS – ZERO HOUR 2003 [PC]
■ COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS 2003 [PC]

■ Combat will rage in the skies, on the land and on the sea, with unique vehicles for NOD and GDI.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIBERIAN WINTER

TIBERIAN SERIES – WESTWOOD STUDIOS + ELECTRONIC ARTS = TIBERIUM WARS

"TIBERIUM WARS COMBINES FAST-PACED GAMEPLAY WITH NEW WAYS TO TELL A STORY IN AN RTS GAME"

MIKE VERDU, ELECTRONIC ARTS

■ Bio Suits can be worn to shield your troops from the harmful effects of Tiberium.

MIAMI VICE: THE GAME



The graphics are good even by PSP standards, with evocative locales and no slow-down.



"ANYONE PHOBIC OF THE KITSCH THAT PERMEATED THE TELEVISION SERIES CAN REST EASY"

DON YOUR WHITE JACKET, IRON YOUR PINK T-SHIRT

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
DEVELOPER: Sierra Entertainment
RELEASE: July
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Absolutely, unquestionably and irrefutably nothing to do with the PS2 game released last year. At all. In any way. Ever.

Hollywood is famous for shitting on its own doorstep. It's a crude way of putting it, but no other phrase quite sums up its tendency to sully triumphs with sequels, remakes and TV spin-offs. Now that videogames are on a more or less even keel with movies, we're seeing more games display the same deplorable quality, with last year's risible *Miami Vice* a case in point. Anyone foolish enough to have suffered the hours of nonsense and cheap nostalgic winks it peddled can blame no one but themselves, and the horrible memories will likely make most people think twice before approaching the new version of *Miami Vice* for PSP – based not on the TV series but on the forthcoming Michael Mann movie, and distinguished from the previous travesty by the addition of the subtitle 'The Game'. Clever.

Anyone phobic of the kitsch that permeated the TV series can rest easy; Michael Mann is setting the film in modern Miami, where the beaches are still wide, the drugs are still rife, but the clothes are slightly more tasteful, and this is what *Miami Vice: The Game* has been based on. From the first second of the first level it's clear that this is a product with more polish than the previous game could dream of. This looks good and plays well, maybe not a world-beater but a significant step up.

The opening level sees you blasting your way through a mansion as either Crockett or Tubbs – or both if you take advantage of the excellent Wi-Fi Co-op mode. The controls are simple to grasp; the shoulder buttons are used to aim and take cover while the square button shoots, and the X button can be used to perform a variety of actions depending on the context – vaulting walls, opening doors and so on. Aiming is very similar to that in *Resident Evil 4*; press the button and the camera moves to an over-the-shoulder view where you can pick your shot with the aid of a mounted laser sight. The enemies showed intelligence, requiring you to make use of the available cover for safe passage through the game.

You're an undercover officer, and your conduct in each level affects your reputation. Higher accuracy rates, good use of weaker weapons, even a well-chosen outfit will all raise your 'rep', allowing you to approach more powerful crime lords in the inter-mission drug dealing sequences. There's more here, much more, including speedboat levels and a variety of mini-games, so while the action did occasionally smack of repetition, there are enough facets to the experience to further justify a purchase. There are only a handful of decent action games for PSP; we never thought we'd say it, but *Miami Vice: The Game* could be one more.



Aiming is similar to that in *Resident Evil 4*, although the PSP controls do make it tough.


eMag

TOO HUMAN



The use of light and colour is striking, taking full advantage the power of 360.

"EXPERIENCE THE FULL EXCITEMENT OF COMBAT THROUGH A DYNAMICALLY DRIVEN PRESENTATION SYSTEM THAT PORTRAYS THE COMBAT WITH CINEMATIC QUALITY"

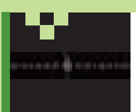
MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

HUMAN LEAGUE

DEVIL MAY CRY + HALO x PURPLE = TOO HUMAN

The enemy forces vary in size considerably – this chap, for example, will take some beating.

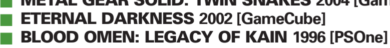


DEVELOPER PROFILE

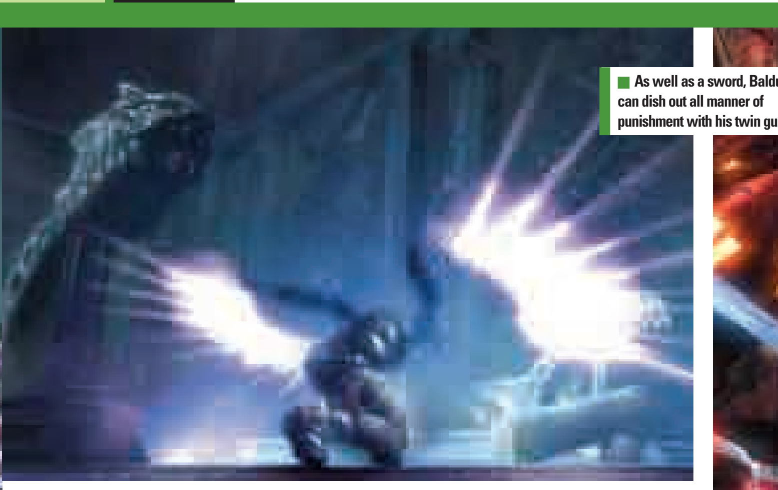
■ Silicon Knights found fame with *Eternal Darkness* on GameCube, a title whose maturity and intelligent narrative still stands head and shoulders above most examples of plot-led games. Recently the firm ported *Metal Gear Solid* to GameCube, before turning its attention to *Too Human*.

HISTORY

■ METAL GEAR SOLID: TWIN SNAKES 2004 [GameCube]
■ ETERNAL DARKNESS 2002 [GameCube]
■ BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN 1996 [PSOne]







■ As well as a sword, Baldur can dish out all manner of punishment with his twin guns.

SILICON KNIGHTS' LONG-AWAITED ACTION EPIC BURSTS ONTO 360



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Silicon Knights
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

■ A sci-fi *Devil May Cry*-style 'dojo' action game with chainable combos, breathtaking graphics and an in-depth story.

When a new IP is pitched as "the first part of a trilogy" it's hard to know whether to baulk at the arrogance or admire the ambition. On one hand you have the *Halo*s of this world, and on the other you have gaming abortions such as *Advent Rising*. With *Too Human*, Silicon Knights – the mind behind compelling GameCube survival horror *Eternal Darkness* – is promising the earth. "The birth of an icon", an "epic beginning to a captivating trilogy", and "unparalleled visual fidelity" are the firm's trio of outlandish claims coming out of this year's E3. Normally such PR hot air would pass through one ear and out of the other, but spending time in the company of Baldur, *Too Human*'s lightning-quick hero, has given us reason to listen.

At its core, *Too Human* is a combat-action game – in the mould of *Devil May Cry* or *Ninja Gaiden* – given the full 360 treatment. In other words, it looks phenomenal. Remember in *Halo* the first time you saw plasma burn into a wall or a Needler shatter 100 foot in the air like a fluorescent firework? *Too Human* elicits a similar reaction within minutes of play. As Baldur shoots, slices and speeds around the enemy machines, a next-gen light show pours out of the screen in glorious high definition. Suffice to say, *Too Human* is one attractive videogame.

This of course means very little if it plays poorly. Thankfully, at this stage Silicon Knights' title is doing its job admirably, providing a heady mix of melee and weapon-based chainable combat with an emphasis on speed and style. In terms of gameplay, it's not a sizeable departure from many PS2 games, but the scope of battles and volume of on-screen enemies are quite something to behold. *Too Human* obviously adheres to the "bigger is better" motto that has defined the majority of Xbox 360's early catalogue – huge, open environments littered with enemies, captured with the dynamism of a Hollywood blockbuster.

> "TOO HUMAN CUTS, PANS, ZOOMS AND TILTS LIKE A GUILLERMO DEL TORO MOVIE"

Silicon Knights has spent a considerable amount of *Too Human*'s development time creating a spectacular and surprisingly intelligent camera system to depict high tech massacres. Unlike many games in the genre, which utilise fixed camera positions, *Too Human* cuts, pans, zooms and tilts like a Guillermo Del Toro movie – and it works. For instance, upon encountering a large group of foes, the game's camera will pull back dramatically to reveal the scale of the ensuing action. When you reduce the opposition numbers and are left with just a few opponents, the view pulls in tight, determining the most dramatic angle to portray the slaughter. This game displays a directorial flair that is sorely lacking in a great many of its peers.

So, there can be no doubt that *Too Human* looks superb, is brimming with potential and that early skirmishes play well, but one pertinent question remains: is "bigger is better" what the games-playing public really want? With Wii spewing innovation from every pore, Xbox Live effectively taking over the home console world and the potential for excellence on PS3, do we really want to sit alone with a single-player game that resembles the last generation in so many ways? Perhaps it's post-E3 malaise, or perhaps a genuine ennui with unoriginality, but unless *Too Human* displays more ingenuity and ideas in its latter stages, there's a good chance it may get lost in the mix come the end of the year. High production values and rich heritage are not always enough any more.

FOUR PLAY

One of the more interesting aspects of *Too Human* is its Xbox Live Co-Operative mode which supports up to four players. Working in a similar way to *Halo* or even *Gauntlet*, players team up to take on increased numbers of enemies, and battle through the story together. Imagine the relief when a team-mate blasts an enemy seconds before it slices you in half, or standing side by side with three cohorts against a horde of marauding foes. Online co-operative modes are becoming more fashionable by the day, which is no bad thing – we just hope that the rest of Xbox 360's big winter games will follow suit.

SUPER PAPER MARIO

GAMECUBE'S FIRST AND LAST CLASSIC MARIO PLATFORMER

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
RELEASE: Christmas 2006 (Japan: August/ US: October)
GENRE: Platform RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Part platform, part adventure, part role-playing game – *Super Paper Mario* takes the series in a new direction.

Nintendo is fairly good at surprise announcements, but nonetheless when a proper fully fledged Mario game is peeking over the horizon, you'd expect there to be a little more fanfare. Tucked away at the tail end of the lonely GameCube release list with only *Twilight Princess* for company, *Super Paper Mario* may well be the GameCube's last great game (if not its last game all together, the poor neglected thing) – from the experience we've had with it so far, things certainly bode well.

Super Paper Mario blends classic platform Mario with the RPG elements and setting of the superb *Paper Mario* games, and in many ways it could be considered a companion to DS's *New Super Mario Bros* in the way that it encapsulates the vibrancy and creativity of the original Mario games' spirit and wraps it up in a modern presentation. The game's paper premise is still as creatively exploited as it has been in the past, with Mario transforming into a paper aeroplane or turning sideways to become paper-thin at will. Also in common with *Paper Mario*, there are numerous companions in the game who will follow the player about, proffering advice and useful skills. Oddly dubbed 'Fareins', the only one we've seen so far is a strange butterfly whose special powers were still under wraps, but it appeared to be able to identify enemies and their weaknesses (like Goombella's Tattle in *The Thousand-Year Door*) and could transform into both a hammer and an abstract hand to clear the way for Mario as he made his way through the level.

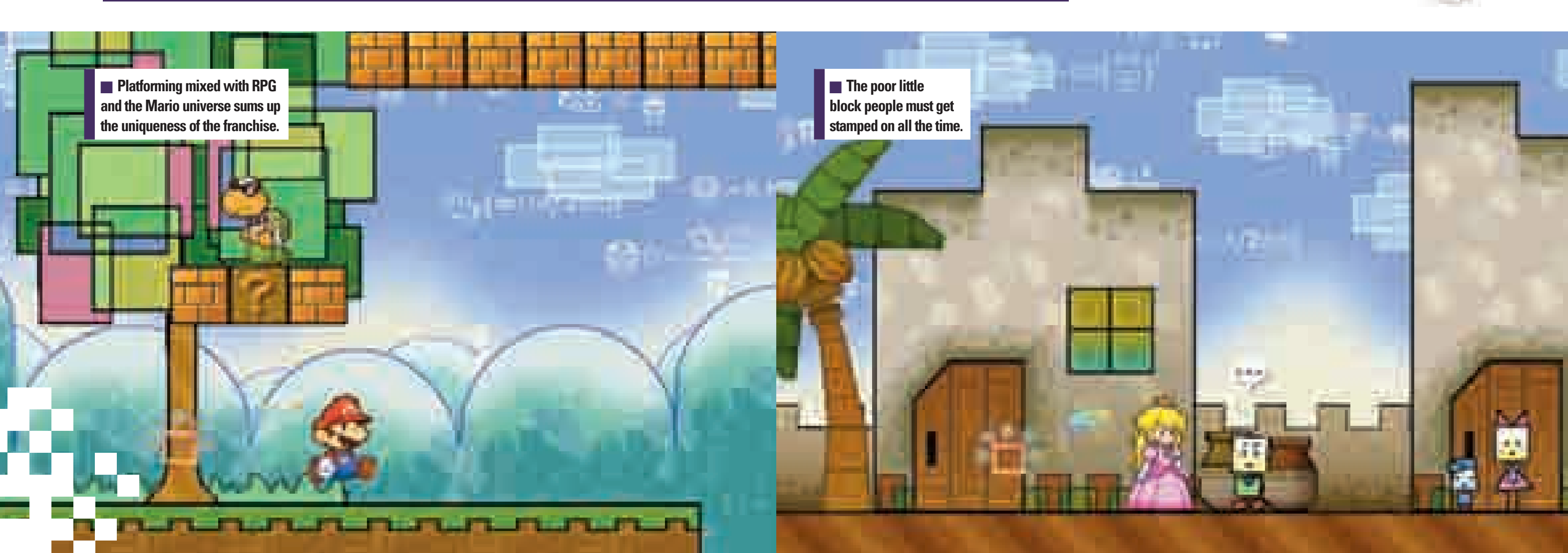
> "WE HAVE SUPER PAPER MARIO PEGGED AS THE SURPRISE HIT OF THE YEAR"

Mario, too, had his own special skill, which really turns the concept of 2D Mario on its head – when you press the R button the perspective changes to behind Mario's back, giving you a look at the level in 3D. The possibilities here for hidden secrets, warp pipes and items (maybe even badges) are limitless – this is exactly the kind of evolution of the two-dimensional Mario formula that could have really validated *New Super Mario Bros*. It's an inspired idea from inspired developer Intelligent Systems, and it's not the only new twist on the classic concept to which *Super Mario Bros* pays homage. In a nod to *Super Princess Peach*, you can now switch between Mario, Bowser and Peach at will at any time during a level, and each has their own specific skills (Peach's, typically, seem to amount to floating about with her precious little umbrella). This is the first time since *Super Mario RPG* that the three have worked together – although we've no idea about the story. Apparently it's something to do with dimension doors and/or Bowser kidnapping Peach in order to marry her. Intelligent Systems' games are often very strong in the story department, though we doubt that that's all the plot will amount to.

The presentation and attitude of the *Paper Mario* games has always brought a smile to our faces, and *Super Paper Mario* looks like it could be just as full of nostalgic references and tongue-in-cheek homages to other Mario games as *The Thousand-Year Door* before it. It's good to see Nintendo returning to its roots as well as bombarding us all with new ways to play via Wii and Nintendo DS. We have *Super Paper Mario* pegged as the surprise hit of the year, assuming it meets its tentative release date of Autumn 2006.

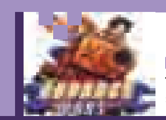
MASSIVELY RETRO

Mario, Peach and Bowser occasionally turn into giant versions of their original *Super Mario Bros* sprites, much as Mario and Luigi can grow to giant proportions and rampage through levels in Nintendo DS's *New Super Mario Bros*. Starmen trigger this miraculous transformation and, exactly like in the DS title, giant characters are invincible. There are no mini-versions of the player characters, though, and other items have changed their function. Blue flowers slow Mario down, red ones speed him up and mushrooms now do nothing more than replenish hit points. It's a little bit strange getting used to having hit points in a Mario platformer, but the style is so reminiscent of *Paper Mario* that it's pretty easy to forget that you're not playing an action-RPG.



■ Platforming mixed with RPG and the Mario universe sums up the uniqueness of the franchise.

■ The poor little block people must get stamped on all the time.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Intelligent Systems has done some great work for Nintendo; the first-party developer's record is full of classics. *Fire Emblem, Advance Wars* and *Paper Mario* may seem disparate titles, but they all share excellent construction and story. It'll be interesting to see how the firm handles a platformer.

HISTORY

- **PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR** 2004 [GC]
- **ADVANCE WARS** 2002 [GBA]
- **POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE** 2001 [N64]

"A 3D ACTION-ADVENTURE THAT DEFIES ALL VIDEOGAME LOGIC"
NINTENDO PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SOMETHING ABOUT PAPER

SUPER MARIO BROS + PLAYABLE BOWSER − ESCHER = SUPER PAPER MARIO



This is *Super Paper Mario's* trump card; see the whole level from Mario's perspective.



BOMBERMAN

AT LAST, A REAL BABY BOOM

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: Hudson Soft
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: Party/Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Run though various mazes and attempt to blow enemies up without getting caught in the blast – we all know how it works by now, right?

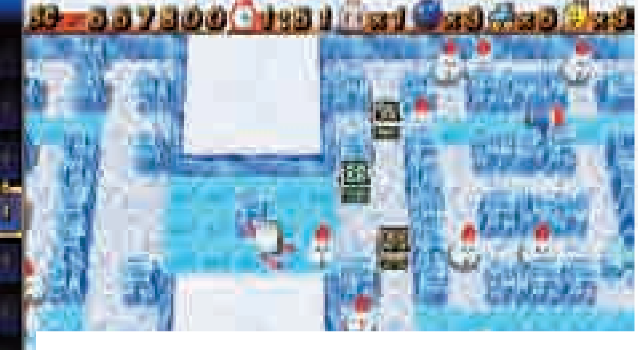
***Bomberman* is a game that isn't really changing with the times – and with good reason.** Almost every 'update' that any company has dared to supply has disappointed on some level and failed even to match – let alone build upon – the formula that proved so enticing in the beginning. Instead, we are seeing the series dragged from format to format with the ever-popular Battle mode always appearing, essentially unchanged, to make up for the fact that the tweaks that have been implemented in the 'best-yet' – and obviously 'explosive' – single-player campaign aren't really as good as they ought to be.

Fortunately, this is what the masses are after. The unsuitably entitled Main game has always tended to take a backseat to the multi-player modes in Bomberman games, so the arrival of the first PSP version is very good news indeed.



This is all going to end in tears. Not ours, though.

"THIS IS AN OLD-STYLE VIDEOGAME AND THERE'S ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO BE GAINED BY CREATING ANY VERSION THAT WILL BE OUTDONE BY A FORERUNNER"



For all the fun we've reaped from *Bomberman* on home consoles, a portable version makes sense. It's a game that will travel well, and although versions have already appeared on DS and mobile phone formats there's never been a portable version to offer the quality expected. The DS version, especially, failed to deliver despite involving eight-players at once.

The PSP version, however, is shaping up to be exactly what is needed. A *Generations* viewpoint is offered as default, which allows for decent looks as well as accurate movement, and the fact that four people can play off the one UMD is a bonus that makes the multi-player modes all the more accessible.

Our only real concern at this point in the proceedings is the speed at which the game plays. This is something that a great many recent *Bomberman* offerings have suffered from – again, the Nintendo DS edition managed to let down in this area – and we're getting far too used to having to collect at least three Roller Skate power-ups before the game becomes as frantic as it should always be. Still, these things are all about the balance and only extended play on finished code is going to determine whether the speed/accuracy/power-up balance has been implimented just right. There's always the chance that there could be customisable options and items so you can create your own balance – it's happened in various Bomberman titles before now, so why not again?

When it comes down to it, this is an old-style videogame and there's absolutely nothing to be gained by creating any version that will be outdone by a forerunner. It sounds obvious, but it's an error that keeps being made. Here's hoping that this time things turn out exactly as they should.



The first boss from *Bomberman Generations* on the GameCube is apparently going to make an appearance.


eMag

TWO WORLDS



Goblin-orc things always seem to be on the wrong side. We wonder if there have ever been any noble, courageous goblin types.

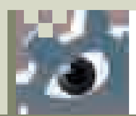
"[REALITY PUMP IS] DEVELOPING AN EXPERIENCE THAT EVERY RPG PLAYER HAS WAITED A LIFETIME FOR: A GAME THAT IS BASED ON REAL-LIFE ENVIRONMENTAL SCENARIOS CATAPULTED INTO IN A BREATHTAKING FANTASY WORLD"

JAMES SEAMAN – TOPWARE MANAGING DIRECTOR

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BIG WIDE WORLD

OBLIVION + EMOTION – PERMANENT DECISIONS = TWO WORLDS

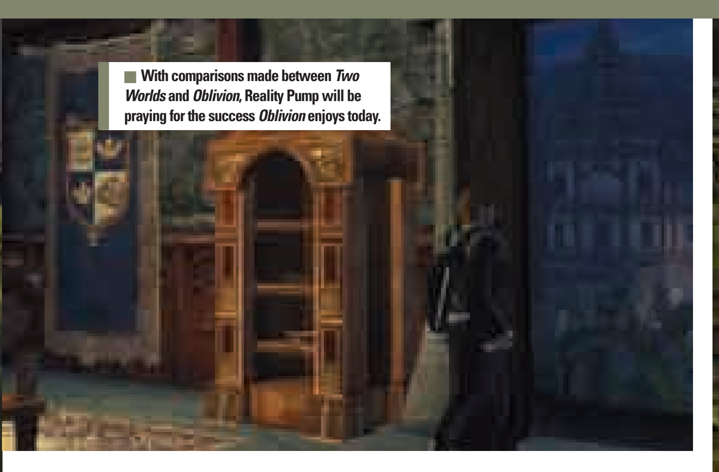


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Reality Pump came into being back in 1995, when TopWare Interactive saw the birth of a new studio in Krakow, Poland. Quite why the name 'Reality Pump' was chosen for this arm of the company we're not entirely sure, but the studio went on to create *Earth 2140* and the title's two predecessors.

HISTORY

- **KNIGHTSHIFT** 2004 [PC]
- **FRONTLINE ATTACK: WAR OVER EUROPE** 2002 [PC]
- **WORLD WAR III: BLACK GOLD** 2001 [PC]



With comparisons made between *Two Worlds* and *Oblivion*, Reality Pump will be praying for the success *Oblivion* enjoys today.



This place looks peaceful. It'll probably be burned to the ground in a few chapters' time.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE THEY BOTH LOOK A LITTLE FAMILIAR?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: Zuxxez
DEVELOPER: Reality Pump
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

Choose your own path, professions and skills as you take on a divided land and attempt to be on the winning side.

For a lengthy period, *Oblivion* consumed our life, and the game is currently still doing the rounds, relieving others of one basic need – time. Although we've indulged in adventures of this type before now, *Oblivion* has managed to snare us – and others – with the new weapon in the genre's arsenal, namely 'accessibility'.

Bringing a game of that size to a home console was always going to be a winning decision. We won, you won, they won, but most of all the genre won. Gamers that would never have even glanced at an RTS adventure title before, now hold the genre in a fair light thanks to 360, and popularity is high. As a result, it's a good time to start pushing your RTS adventure title if you have one. Oh, hello *Two Worlds*... What's that you say? You're a bit like *Oblivion*?

This really isn't a bad thing. If you're going to start receiving comparisons, they may as well link you to one of the greatest games 2006 has had to offer so far, and – in some ways at least – *Two Worlds* stands a chance of improving upon the formula already seen in *Oblivion*.

We're essentially looking at another sprawling fantasy landscape for you to do whatever you like in. The title '*Two Worlds*' refers to the two warring factions that you have to choose between and in all likelihood end up betraying in many amusing ways. However, whereas *Oblivion* put the majority of effort into the overall experience, *Two Worlds* has opted to take some of the smaller key gameplay elements and develop them. The combat is a good example of this. The sword slashes and simple magic attacks seen in *Oblivion* were deemed too basic for *Two Worlds*, and so a far more intricate system has been put into place with core attacks activating automatically when a foe is 'clicked' upon and then the focus moving to punctuating these blows with more powerful attacks and skills selected by the player. Rather than hammering away in the hope of beating an enemy, these skills can be used tactically in a *Magic: The Gathering* way, allowing you to, in theory, beat enemies that are of a far higher level than you. Sure, it'll be tough, but at least it won't be impossible.

> "IT'S A GOOD TIME TO START PUSHING YOUR RTS ADVENTURE TITLE IF YOU HAVE ONE"

Another example is the way your actions shape the story. Completing missions for one faction may see them advance and take over outposts and towns previously controlled by the other – changing the missions and items available from that place at that time. Something similar was achieved recently in *Guild Wars: Factions*, and it worked extremely well in that case, so if *Two Worlds* can achieve something similar and deliver the 200 different possible endings that are currently rumoured, then Reality Pump could be on to a winner.

The popularity of Xbox can't be solely credited to the success of *Oblivion*. The game itself was stunning in many ways, and for all the favours it may have done *Two Worlds* by being successful, if the game doesn't at least equal its achievements, it's likely to be overlooked. Hopefully, with the new ideas on offer – such as PC and 360 players being able to team up online – *Two Worlds* will be given the chance to make its mark.

ALL CHANGE

Although *Two Worlds* seems to share plenty with others in its genre, it seems it will take a slightly different approach to character building. Rather than making your various decisions and then living by them as you slowly grind up through the levels, *Two Worlds* apparently lets you level up quickly and change primary profession and secondary profession as well as any skills as often as you like. Exactly how this will effect play is uncertain, but we fear it may take something away from the experience of an RPG like this. After all, what's the point of pondering over decisions when a poor choice is so easily reversed?

SHADOWRUN



This is the Tree of Life where players can come to be healed in the heat of battle.



For the right price, you can buy the ability to see through walls.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

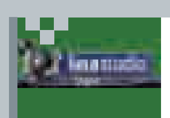
IN THE SHADOWS

ROLE-PLAYING GAME	–	HOURS OF PLAY	+	UNREAL TOURNAMENT	=	SHADOWRUN

"SHADOWRUN PROPELS TEAM-BASED COMBAT INTO A NEW DIMENSION"

MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

The object under the blue light is an artefact in *Shadowrun's* version of Capture the Flag.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

FASA Interactive is not exactly a new studio, but you could say that until now it's had narrow ambitions. With *Crimson Skies* being the only significant departure from hulking, mechanical bodysuits, *Shadowrun* marks a voyage into uncharted territory for FASA, and for the series.

HISTORY

- **MECHASSAULT 2** 2005 [Xbox]
- **CRIMSON SKIES: HIGH ROAD TO REVENGE** 2003 [Xbox]
- **MECHWARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES** 2002 [PC]

IS THAT THE SOUND OF FANBOYS' TEETH GRINDING?



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: FASA Interactive/Microsoft
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 2 (2-16 Online)

CONCEPT

Taking the effort out of the RPG and replacing it with FPS thrills, this will probably anger as many as it delights.

There was a time when Radiohead could have farted into a paper bag and a million people would have queued up to hear it. Indeed, many of their followers felt they'd done just that when they released *Kid A*, an album of ambient electronica to follow up the rock masterpieces that made their name. The fans were split – some loved it, some hated it – but nigh on everybody was disappointed. Yes, they wanted more, but they wanted more of what made them love the band in the first place.

Challenging your fans is a dangerous business for anyone working in entertainment media. Whether an author, a band or a series of videogames, once the respect and trust of an audience has been won, radical change can quickly result in disaster. FASA Interactive is entering into that same volatile territory with *Shadowrun*, its contribution to the long-running RPG franchise. The series has had four previous instalments, and in that time has built up a dense and intriguing mythology. It's a world where the forces of science and magic are in constant conflict, a world of fantastical creatures and genetic mutants, of malevolent corporations and ancient languages. It is the kind of universe that can only be nurtured in a genre with depth and scope, and now it's being brought to the FPS market. By using a franchise like *Shadowrun*, FASA can provide a compelling plot for a genre famed for being shallow. The ripples of indignation among the hardcore will already have started, but there is logic and even inspiration in the idea.

Set in 2012 and based around the discovery of a temple in Brazil, players will choose to join either The Lineage, a group devoted to protecting the temple's secrets, or The Corporation, who wish to exploit its hidden powers. Like *Counter-Strike*, the Single-player mode will be minimal with a massive emphasis placed on online battles – *Shadowrun* will be one of the first titles to allow PCs and Xbox 360s to link up via Xbox Live Anywhere. The teams will comprise humans, elves and other magical species, all of which will have specific strengths, as well as access to unique powers and weapons. Examples we've seen include teleportation, the power to see through walls, the ability to bring your colleagues back from the dead and a host of guns and bombs more anchored in the realms of science – an intriguing mix of the traditional and the magical that should add a new dimension to assembling a successful team. You will be able to level-up your character and acquire new powers between rounds, the upshot being that the abilities of both teams will constantly evolve throughout the battle.

The FPS and the RPG represent wildly different approaches to gaming, so while fans of the original may be upset by this new direction, the choice was unlikely to have been made with only them in mind. It is frustrating when something you treasure seems to turn away from you, but that devotion doesn't imply ownership. *Shadowrun* is an attempt to introduce the franchise to a wider audience while also challenging its existing one – an experiment that should be encouraged rather than maligned, even if it does turn out to be a fart in a paper bag.



If you see a team-mate gunned down, you can use your powers to heal them.



The environments will include the temple and the towering buildings of a futuristic metropolis.

> "BY USING A FRANCHISE LIKE SHADOWRUN, FASA CAN PROVIDE A COMPELLING PLOT FOR A GENRE FAMED FOR BEING SHALLOW"

ALL ABOUT ESSENCE

How often you can use magic depends on how much 'Essence' you have. The kicker is that every time you add a new power or ability, your Essence decreases. Carry one spell and you'll be able to use it at will, carry three and you'll have to use magic sparingly. It's another example of how *Shadowrun* is attempting to introduce more tactical consideration into the gung-ho realm of first-person combat, requiring you to think carefully before assembling a team and entering battle.

GETAWAY

MUGS AND SLAGS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ A chance for Sony to improve on the technically impressive but flawed titles in its much-hyped *Getaway* series.

PS3

Should anyone harbour any vivid memories of PlayStation2's *The Getaway*, it's far more likely that they are linked to the weight of disappointment than the achievements of the game itself. It was hyped up, talked about and pushed back time and time again until the underwhelming product that finally surfaced was greeted with a similarly lukewarm critical reaction. Even the UK, still rejoicing in Guy Ritchie-inspired mockney gangster bravado, didn't take it entirely to their hearts. *The Getaway* cost millions and tried to be something amazing, but ended up a pretty game with abundant swearing and violence, and a disappointing lack of everything else.

Despite the uneven nature of the game, it sold admirably well – as did its sequel *Black Monday* – and so Sony's PlayStation3 update is not quite the baffling move it may at first appear. Indeed, there is a kind of twisted logic to making a new instalment for a commercially successful, though critically indifferent franchise; the sales are there for the taking, and you're unlikely to suffer unfavourable comparisons with other games in the series.

Now simply called *Getaway* – the 'The' being far too current gen – Sony seems to be focussing early promotional material on how accurately PS3 has recreated London. It's a dubious achievement, as the previous games already did a fine job of this, and despite the undoubtedly impressive level of detail, it speaks not of a better game, simply a higher level of polish. In the land of the next gen, a gorgeous screenshot tells you less about quality than ever before, and Sony would do well to remember that the major failing of the first two titles lay with their gameplay – not their looks.

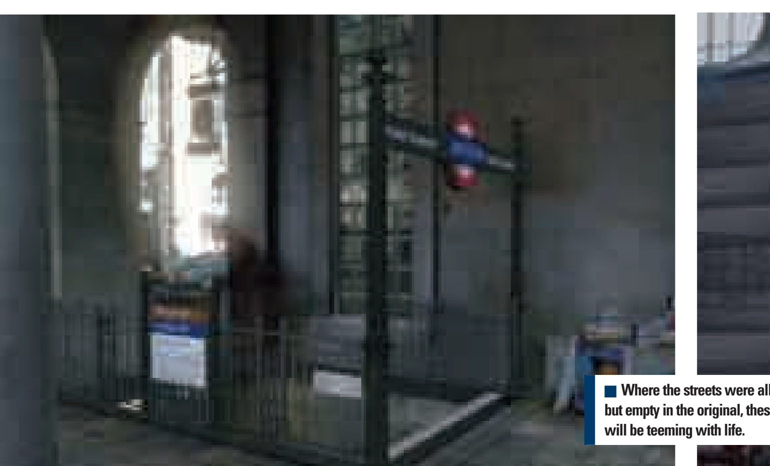


■ All of the major sights are present, but this time with a next-gen polish.

> "THE MAJOR FAILING OF THE FIRST TWO TITLES LAY WITH THEIR GAMEPLAY – NOT WITH THEIR LOOKS"

Details are thin on the ground, but we can safely expect a more open-world structure than the rigid, mission-based gameplay of the original. The story will obviously be centred on London, but a recent trailer has provided a tantalising clue as to a potential new location. It opens on a suburban street where people are going about their daily business. The camera pulls back slowly, retreating through an open doorway and into a dark room, where a grizzled man with spiked hair points a smoking gun at a figure slumped dead on a chair.

So far so *Getaway*, except this street is no London cul-de-sac. With the canal and the tightly packed, ornate-roofed, four-tier housing, as well as the abundance of people on bikes … the city outside is unquestionably Amsterdam, and it would suggest that the plot will flit between the two locations, possibly following the prolific drug trade that exists between them. Reports of an eight-hour mission 'shrooming in Vondelpark have proved unfounded.



■ Where the streets were all but empty in the original, these will be teeming with life.


eMag

MASS EFFECT


You will travel in a team, all of whom can be controlled and have their own specific strengths.

BIOWARE KEEPS IT REAL

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: BioWare Corp
RELEASE: TBA (US: Q2 '07)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

An RPG that aims to level-up the realism of character interaction in the genre but without scrimping on the action.

In the bygone days of 3D graphics, creating a photo-realistic and believably human CG character was always considered something of a holy grail. This was during a time when *Virtua Racing's* crude polygons constituted cutting edge, but even so, the fabrication of a human was an achievement held in such high esteem that it actually justified the creation of that risible movie tie-in, *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within.*

The graphical capabilities of home consoles have progressed so far since then that realistic human characters have become a given. The next-generation consoles are bound to usher in yet more advancements – evidenced by the astounding PS3 tech-demo at E3, showcasing an uncannily accurate Tiger Woods – and BioWare's new RPG *Mass Effect* is claiming to have the most authentic human characters, in both appearance and actions, ever seen.

The story takes place in 2183, in a community that spans the far reaches of the galaxy, where enormous diversity of life has caused bitter feuds between species. You take control of Commander Shepherd, the first human 'Spectre' – a Jedi-like taskforce charged with maintaining peace. You discover an ancient prophecy that speaks of genocide being visited upon the galaxy every 50,000 years, and wouldn't you know it, it's 49,999 years since it last happened.

The plot isn't too much more sophisticated than most RPGs, but BioWare is placing much more emphasis on the realism of the world you inhabit. Before the game begins you can customise Commander Shepherd to suit your tastes. Gender, age, face, body and hair can all be adjusted, as well as your character class and preferred skills.

You move through the game in a team of three, all of whom you can control and level-up. In the version we saw, Shepherd was accompanied by a woman and a humanoid species of alien. Every character in the game has their own personality and can be talked to, with all conversations occurring in real-time. As they speak, you are presented with up to six possible responses – as well as options to threaten and bribe – choose the right one and you'll be successful, choose the wrong one, or even start your response a second too soon, and the avenues of communication will close rapidly. You see, in the world of *Mass Effect,* the computer characters don't like being interrupted. Each conversation is shown in close-up, the glorious level of detail magnifying every physical response, with even the pitch of the voices altering as the mood of the situation changes. At all times it's key to adhere to your remit to maintain peace – treat a stranger badly and members of your group can become frustrated and abandon you.

Your allies are particularly valuable in battle situations, as, unusually for an RPG, *Mass Effect* sports real-time, squad-based combat. The game is mostly seen from a third-person perspective, but in Combat mode the camera fixes behind Shepherd's shoulder, much like the targeting viewpoint in *Resident Evil 4.* At any point, you can freeze the action and order one of your team to move to a new location. It isn't in-depth, but it does allow you to perform rudimentary tactics and manoeuvres. Which just begs the question, what do you do? Shoot first and ask questions later, or the other way round?

"MASS EFFECT IS CLAIMING TO HAVE THE MOST AUTHENTIC HUMAN CHARACTERS"

THREE'S A CROWD

Ambition isn't a quality that *Mass Effect* is short of, but BioWare is reaching for the stars even by its own high standards. The game is the first in a planned trilogy, with every game boasting a complete and satisfying climax. The story will be continued between instalments, with the release of downloadable content through Xbox Live. Whether new missions to embark on or new worlds to explore, this will ensure that the narrative will never stop altogether, the plot thickening nicely in time for the next game's release.




Combat is real-time and far more frenetic than a traditional RPG.

DEVELOPER PROFILE

Founded by three doctors in 1995, Edmonton-based BioWare Corp has established itself as one of the premier developers of role-playing games. The success of titles such as *NeverWinter Nights* and *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic* led to a merger with Pandemic Studios in 2005 and the opening of a new Texas studio in March this year.

HISTORY



- **JADE EMPIRE** 2005 [Xbox]
- **STAR WARS: KOTOR** 2003 [Multi]
- **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS** 2002 [PC]

There will be a wide range of landscapes including jungles, temples, deserts and abandoned cities.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

KEEPING IT REAL

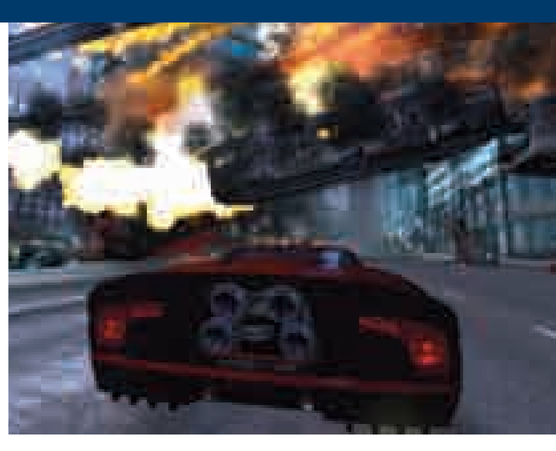
STAR WARS: KOTOR – STAR WARS + REALISTIC CONVERSATION = MASS EFFECT

"THE RESULTING EXPERIENCE IS ONE IN WHICH PLAYERS WILL FEEL AS IF THEY ARE PART OF A RICH, LIVING WORLD"
MICROSOFT PRESS RELEASE

Shepherd's ship the Normandy will ferry you across the game's expansive universe.

FULL AUTO 2: BATTLELINES


■ The new game will feature more than 20 cars, each with its own capabilities.



"IT MAY NOT CHANGE THE WORLD, BUT FULL AUTO 2 LOOKS LIKE SOLID, RELIABLE FUN"

THE NEXT GENERATION CAN STILL DO FUN

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Pseudo Interactive
RELEASE: TBA (US: Q4 '06)
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 2 (2-8 Online)

CONCEPT

■ Take to the streets in tooled-up cars to visit fiery death upon your enemies, civilian transport and municipal buildings.

PS3 **Sony has a lot to answer for.** The months of incessant hype, missed deadlines, childish sniping and too-good-to-be-true specs have left every man, woman and child expecting PlayStation3 to be something truly extraordinary – a machine of otherworldly power. This idea is based upon more than simple hope. Early footage from games like *Assassin's Creed* and *Resistance: Fall Of Man* has been mouth-wateringly impressive, but there's always the nagging feeling that the finished game won't look quite as good as the FMV used to promote it.

It almost seems inappropriate that the sequel to a game like *Full Auto* should be released on a machine of such potential. The original was fun, but a world-beater? A groundbreaker? It's a sobering reminder that PlayStation3 will, for the most part and much like Xbox 360, be just another console. And we say 'thank heavens for that', because there will always be room in our lives for some good, old-fashioned auto destruction.

Needless to say the game looks prettier, but Pseudo Interactive promises a larger playing space too. There will certainly be restrictions on how far you can go, but the arenas will feel more real and lived in. This goes hand-in-hand with the increased levels of interaction with the environment. One example we've seen showed a car firing missiles at an elevated train track, sending the whole structure crashing to the floor and showering two hapless opponents with rubble. The environments will also be riddled with short cuts, so that destruction can be used to your benefit as well as to hinder others.

A few handling niggles have been cleaned up – the cars will be more distinct from one another, and all will feel much heavier to combat the 'floaty' handling of the original. Weapon choice will be dictated by what car you are driving, with a total of 20 weapons available across all vehicles. The developers hope that this, along with the improved range and selection of vehicles, will encourage more tactical thinking when it comes to equipping for the race ahead.

Single-player mode looks well thought out, but the real boon is the expanded Multi-player mode. *Full Auto* lacked a Death-match mode, and Pseudo Interactive has been kind enough to add one and a lot more besides. Up to eight players will be able to go head-to-head in a variety of team-based and free-for-all modes, making this a prime candidate for success on Sony's fledgling online service. It may not change the world, but *Full Auto 2: Battlelines* looks like solid, reliable fun, and until the real power and potential of PS3 is revealed, that'll do just fine.


■ The world waits to see what PlayStation3 makes of such a well-worn concept.


eMag

HEROES OF ANNIHILATED EMPIRES



We know there aren't any pictures of jet planes or tanks, but trust us, they'll be there.

Some of the game's environments are stunningly imagined.

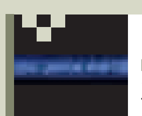
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

FANTASY AND FIREPOWER

THE LORD OF THE RINGS + RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR × MODERN WARFARE = HEROES OF ANNIHILATED EMPIRES

"WEAVES TOGETHER THE BEST ELEMENTS FROM RTS AND RPG GENRES TO CREATE A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE"

– GSC WORLD PUBLISHING PRESS RELEASE



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ GSC Game World is a Kiev-based development studio that is well respected as a maker of role-playing games that boast seemingly limitless numbers of controllable units. Their one big departure from the genre, the first-person shooter *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl*, is much anticipated but remains unreleased.

HISTORY

- S.T.A.L.K.E.R. 2006 [PC]
- COSSACKS: THE ART OF WAR 2002 [PC]
- CODENAME: OUTBREAK 2001 [PC]



■ The RPG element will allow you to collect and use powerful spells.



■ There are four different factions to choose between, each with its own land, weapons and creatures.

NEVER JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Ukraine
PUBLISHER: GSC World Publishing
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '06
GENRE: RTS/RPG
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ Melding RTS with RPG with *The Lord Of The Rings* with the war in Iraq, this is either too weird or too wonderful.

The pleasure we derive from media texts like videogames or movies is largely down to the expectations we bring to them. Every genre has its conventions, signs and signifiers; whether playing an FPS or watching popcorn action, there are certain themes, characters, settings and icons we expect to see. The majority of products stick to the guidelines of their genre, the user's sense of recognition adding to their overall enjoyment, but rigid adherence can also lead to a bland and formulaic end result. For every excellent genre product, say, Michael Mann's *Heat*, there are several flat and uninspiring equivalents, say, Michael Bay's *Bad Boys*.

Adding a rogue element to a well-worn formula is a trick often used in cinema. It has the potential to be a film's undoing, but used effectively it can create a tension that both unsettles and intrigues the viewer. The severed ear in the grass in *Blue Velvet*, the camel-riding cowboy in *Ride The High Country*; sure, they don't belong, but that's what makes it work. Games seldom break the boundaries of their genres in this way, indeed, the best games are strongly similar to generic films: *Halo*, *Resident Evil*, etc – but *Heroes Of Annihilated Ages* attempts to break the mould in two ways.

In the words of GSC Game World, this is a, "real-time strategy versus role-playing game", giving the player power to harvest, build and command in the manner of an RTS, but also to switch at any time to one of their 'Heroes' – great warriors who can fight battles and explore the land in third-person, gathering intelligence, weapons, spells, and making themselves more powerful. It's an original, though not entirely unprecedented technique – recently employed in *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War* – and at first seems to be the only unique thing about *Heroes*.

> "MIXING REAL WORLD MACHINES WITH THE MYTHICAL CREATURES OF LEGEND"

The game is set, as most RPGs seem to be, in a fantasy world straight from the pages of Tolkien. Several factions – including elves, humans and the undead – are locked in a bitter struggle, and you must choose a side to control and lead to victory. There are orcs, elven archers, unicorns, centaurs, ents, trolls and a host of mythical creatures available to you, all beautifully rendered, very cool and just a little bit ordinary. But that's when the footage we saw sprung its really big surprise.

A tank rumbles over the crest of a hill, ploughing into a group of brittle skeletons, while above the heads of the warring elves and orcs two fighter jets come screaming out of the cloudy sky. These are military machines of the real world, the playthings of soldiers in Iraq, yet here they are, mixing it up with the mythical creatures of legend. Images of dragons throwing flames at Harrier jump jets, and huge, hulking trolls pulverising Challenger tanks with one swing of a battered club spring instantly to mind. The developer's revealed little as to how the two worlds will collide, possibly because it can only occur through some nonsensical contrivance, but if the end product is one bit as compelling as we imagine, we'll happily suspend our disbelief.

THE MAGIC NUMBER

So little is known about the story of *Heroes Of Annihilated Empires* that it would be easy to dismiss the presence of modern combat vehicles as just a gimmick. However, GSC Game World insists that this is the first game in a planned trilogy, intimating that the plot is much deeper than we first suspected. How important the modern forces are to the action of the first game is unclear, but it seems certain that they will play more of a part as the series goes on, with the fantasy world possibly encroaching on our own. Armies of the undead ransacking suburban English towns? Dragons getting frisky with glass-clad skyscrapers? Don't bet against it.

THE THE EYE OF JUDGEMENT

"JUDGEMEEEEEEEEENT!"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Live Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ *The Eye Of Judgement* gives collectable battle cards a new dimension on PS3 with the help of a revolutionary new camera.

PS3 **We featured *The Eye Of Judgement* in last month's bumper E3 Showcase, but the little space we had available really wasn't enough to fully explain what it was all about.** The game was revealed at Sony's E3 press conference and had the new tilt controller not stolen all its thunder, it might have been THE big surprise Sony announcement of the show.

It actually looks like something out of a film about the future made back in the Eighties. Basically, players place collectable cards with various monsters on them onto a little table in view of the camera, and the camera then reads the card's 'cybercode' (yes, we know, we know, but that's as much as Sony will tell us about how it actually works), creating a little three-dimensional monster on the screen that matches the one on the card. This reminds us of the first time we saw our beloved *Pokémon* in 3D in *Pokémon Stadium*, although sadly it's extremely unlikely that Sony's camera will ever support *Pokémon* card battles.

There are few details on the cards that the camera technology will actually support. A partnership with game publisher Wizards Of The Coast could bear wondrous fruits – 3D *Magic: The Gathering* battles could be a fantastic prospect. The game we've been shown, though, bears something of a resemblance to Xbox's *Wrath Unleashed* which, in turn, stole a few ideas and stylistic elements from *Heroes Of Might And Magic*. Players battle for control of a 3x3 board on screen, the winner being the first person to control five of the nine squares. Monsters battle each other automatically and the outcome is based on their respective skillsets and weaknesses.

■ Robot battlers weren't showcased at E3 – we had two dragons and that bloody duck.

To be honest, we don't much like the idea of automatic card battles. The fun of card battle games is drawn from how you use the cards in your deck, not simply from what cards are in it.

Apparently there are "more than 30" cards in the *The Eye Of Judgement* set, which looks a bit weak next to the hundreds upon hundreds of cards featured in real-life card games. We can't help but feel that unless strategic depth is added to the game, it will just be a hugely shallow equivalent of *Heroes Of Might And Magic*, except with cards and with the camera novelty.

Mind you, it's still far too early to pass judgement on *The Eye Of Judgement* – come 2007, the camera functionality may well open up all sorts of possibilities, within and outside of the card-battle genre. And if Sony DOES enter into a partnership with Wizards Of The Coast, you heard it here first.

"TO BE HONEST, WE DON'T MUCH LIKE THE IDEA OF AUTOMATIC CARD BATTLES"



■ We can't even BEGIN to express how perfect this would be for *Magic: The Gathering*.



■ Hardly the most exciting interface ever, is it? Oh well, the technology's interesting.


eMag

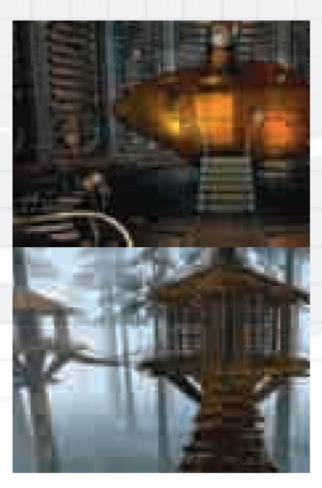
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

MYST

THE WORLD IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

Format: PSP
Origin: US
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Cyan Worlds
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1



Would you believe it, it's been ten years now since *Myst* arrived on the PC and confused us all. Dropping us into a new world with no instructions and no real explanation created one of those gaming experience that many have deemed as art rather than an actual videogame. Now Midway is set to bring a whole new *Myst* universe to PlayStation Portable, and we're not ashamed to say that we're really rather looking forward to this one. We all know that puzzle games work well on handhelds, but *Myst* should take this a little further than many will be used to – let's hope that Midway gives the franchise the treatment and attention it deserves.

RELEASE: TBA

RHYTHM TENGOKU

MOVE WITH THE GROOVE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-House
Genre: Rhythm-Action
Players: TBA



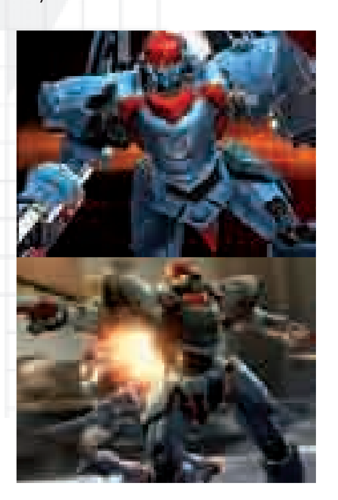
Titles such as *Band Brothers* and *Ouendan!* have proved that, despite a few delicate control issues when balancing on the bus, rhythm-action titles actually work superbly well on handheld consoles. And, just so you have a reason not to put your Game Boy Advance away in a cupboard just yet, Nintendo's team behind the superb *WarioWare* games is bringing out *Rhythm Tengoku* (*Rhythm Heaven* in English) for you to look forward to. Although only currently planned for release in Japan, titles of this sort often tend to prove more than worthy of an import – but you could always sit tight and wait for a PAL release. You never know.

RELEASE: AUGUST

EXTEEL

TEST YOUR METAL

Format: PC
Origin: Korea
Publisher: NCsoft
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action
Players: TBA



This may seem a little clichéd now, but building your own big metal robots from scratch, and then using them to fight other big metal robots that are controlled by friends, enemies and other people dotted around the globe, is an extremely popular hobby. When a game of this type is totally free to download and is actually looking like a considerable pile of fun, then there's no reason not to get involved, is there? Part of NCsoft's upcoming PlayNC label, this is exactly what *Exteel* will be offering, and it's always difficult to predict failure for a title that costs nothing and presents such a broad appeal. We'll let you know more on this once it becomes available.

RELEASE: TBA

MERCURY MELTDOWN

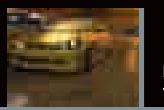
TOO HOT TO HANDLE?

Format: PSP
Origin: UK
Publisher: Ignition
Developer: Awesome Studios
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1



Archer Maclean may not be on board any more, but Awesome is continuing with *Mercury* without him. Although the game may look extremely similar to its forerunner, there are set to be several interesting improvements to the formula that made the last game such a success. One of the prime examples is that the mercury blob itself now has four different states – normal, solid, fast and slow – which allow for a great deal more depth in the levels than the first game offered. There's also a new cel-shaded look to the whole package, which we're not entirely convinced by yet, but since when has cel shading been given an easy time, eh?

RELEASE: TBA



DELAYED – The Fast And The Furious: Tokyo Drift

It could be out any time this year – or even next year. With no set date, we'll just have to sit tight for the 'greatness' this title should bring.

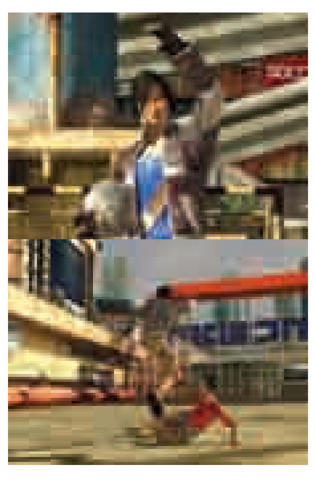
DELAYED – Lumines II

It's sad, but now we'll have to wait until the end of the year for more psychedelic music puzzling from Q Entertainment.

SOCCER FURY

A REAL KICK AROUND

Format:	PC
Origin:	Korea
Publisher:	NCsoft
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Sports
Players:	TBA



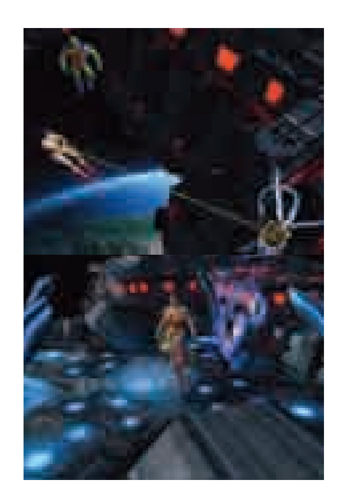
Another PlayNC title that's been announced by NCsoft recently is the appropriately named *Soccer Fury*. This game will see us playing a bit of the old three-on-three street football where players have to hit each other lots, and score goals. It's hardly your classic online affair and it does sound like it may turn out to be a little too similar to *FIFA Street* to us, but again *Soccer Fury* is free to download and so is immediately nowhere near as bad as that monstrosity. When compared to other titles that NCsoft has put its well-respected name to, *Soccer Fury* seems a little strange, but we guess we'll have to wait for a hands on before we pass judgement.

RELEASE: TBA

JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES

WE'RE SUPER, THANKS FOR ASKING

Format:	PS2, Xbox, PSP, DS
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Eidos
Developer:	Snowblind Studios
Genre:	Action RPG
Players:	1-4







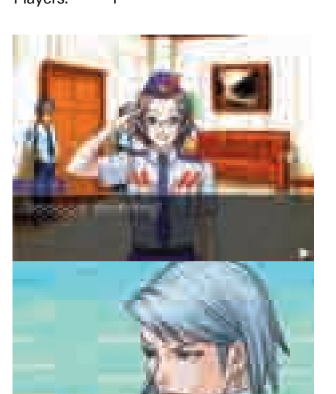
Following hot on the heels of *Marvel Ultimate Alliance* is this very similar looking title from Eidos. There are loads of heroes in the Justice League including, of course, Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, The Flash, Wonder Woman… far too many to list actually. You get to pick out your favourites, form a super-party and lead them through a suitably comic book-esque story that combines action and role-playing elements. While it's already been proved in the past that titles like this can work really well, we can't help but wonder whether this is simply going to serve to disappoint. Guess we'll just have to wait and see…

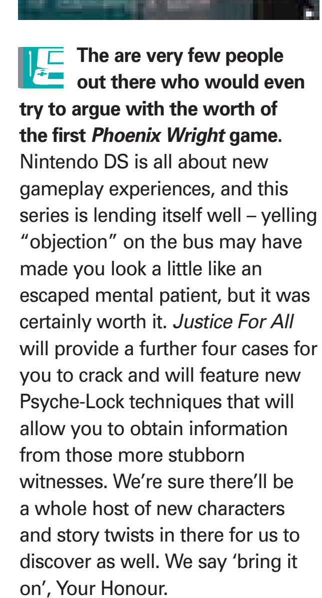
RELEASE: Q4 '06

PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY – JUSTICE FOR ALL

STILL OBJECTING

Format:	Nintendo DS
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Capcom
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Puzzle
Players:	1





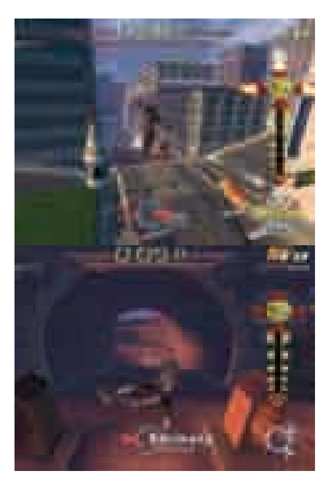
The are very few people out there who would even try to argue with the worth of the first *Phoenix Wright* game. Nintendo DS is all about new gameplay experiences, and this series is lending itself well – yelling "objection" on the bus may have made you look a little like an escaped mental patient, but it was certainly worth it. *Justice For All* will provide a further four cases for you to crack and will feature new Psyche-Lock techniques that will allow you to obtain information from those more stubborn witnesses. We're sure there'll be a whole host of new characters and story twists in there for us to discover as well. We say 'bring it on', Your Honour.

RELEASE: Q1 '07

TONY HAWK'S: DOWNHILL JAM

ROLLING, ROLLING, ROLLING

Format:	Nintendo DS, GBA, Wii
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Activision
Developer:	Toys For Bob
Genre:	Sports
Players:	TBA





We at games™ are massive fans of the masterstroke that is the *Tony Hawk* series, and have happily spent many an hour perfecting our skills – but an accessible *Tony Hawk's*? And one that's aimed at newcomers and is family friendly at that? Sure, it could possibly work well, but plenty more solid evidence is going to be revealed once the Nintendo Wii controller is actually in our hands and we can feel the level of control for ourselves. When it comes down to it, whether it's tricks, skills or just plain old racing, it's all going to come down to control. We're willing to give it a good try, though. He hasn't let us down so far…

RELEASE: Q4 '06


1P
10475

You wouldn't like them when they're angry **Rampage, SMS [Activision] 1988**



The games™ Bible – The Book Of BEAT-'EM-UPS



THE BIBLE. THE GOSPEL. THE TRUTH. ACROSS TWO DECADES OF VIDEOGAMES JOURNALISM, THERE HAVE BEEN COUNTLESS EXAMINATIONS, HISTORIES AND FEATURES ON VIDEOGAME GENRES, BUT NO ONE HAS REALLY GOT DOWN TO THE NITTY GRITTY. WHY DO WE PLAY THESE GAMES? WHAT IS IT ABOUT SPECIFIC GENRES THAT DRAWS CERTAIN TYPES OF GAMERS IN? THE GAMES™ BIBLE, A SIGNATURE SERIES THAT WILL APPEAR REGULARLY OVER THE NEXT YEAR, IS OUR DEFINITIVE LOOK AT THE MULTICOLOURED VIDEOGAME CANON. IN THE COMING MONTHS, WE'LL BE PORING OVER WAR GAMES, MMOS AND RACING GAMES, BUT FOR NOW, JOIN US AS WE ENTER THE ARENA OF FIGHTING GAMES AND THE BOOK OF BEAT-'EM-UPS…

***Fight Club* is portrayed as a dangerous cult buried beneath popular culture – a grimy, grubby, but impossibly cool subculture where The Narrator (Ed Norton) abandons the comfort of his middle-of-the-road, comfortable life to indulge in a primal, violent underground.** The history of fighting games has been mulled over many times and even the laziest researcher will be able to draw a hazy line from *Street Fighter II: World Warrior* to the current status quo where the battlegrounds have shifted from arcades to consoles and the likes of *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* and *Tekken 5*. Now, the fighting game scene is dangerously close to the cult that Tyler Durden created – edgy, underground, cool, threatened by the mainstream. Yet somehow it survives through the presence of its big-name fighters and the players who aspire to be them. But who are the fighters? Who are the people that make up videogames' very own Fight Club?

SINGLE-PLAYER FIGHTING games are mostly worthless. The AI simply cannot provide an adequate substitute for a living, breathing, thinking opponent, and in most cases single-player modes are merely token gestures. *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* and *SoulCalibur III* are the exceptions to this rule, but they, like other fighting games, live through the people who play them. It's not the game that creates the moments through rigid set-pieces. The players are the ones who create the moments, the drama and the memories that filter through to other players via word of mouth and online videos.

In this regard, fighting games is one genre with an abundance of big-name players who frequently travel to tournaments the world over. Familiar international names on the circuit for various fighting games include Ohnuki (Japan), Nin (Korea), BillyKane (France), Ryan Hart (England) and Justin Wong (US). The reason these players are able to reach these levels of fame is because fighting games work as a spectator sport. They are essentially popular for the same reason that boxing, wrestling or any other one-on-one sport is popular – you're seeing two players at the height of their powers battling in a competitive environment where mind games and tactics are on full display.

As the fighting is enclosed in a small 'arena', there are no problems with viewing the action either. Other genres have their own unique problems when trying to present themselves as a spectator sport. With FPSs, it's the lack of a universal viewpoint that conveys the drama of what's happening. With racing games, it's easier to gauge performance on lap times rather than in-game action, and again the lack of a universal viewpoint doesn't help. With sports games, it's the lack of defined skill that makes it hard to spot if you're watching an actual human player or the AI in action.

However, in keeping with the underground ethic cultivated over the years, the fighting game has lent itself perfectly to the spectator format. Those unfamiliar with fighting games can come in with little knowledge, yet immediately understand that Player A and Player B are fighting to survive. The rise of the Internet has helped spread the names of noted players. Shoryuken.com is the central hub for fighting game players to meet while YouTube and Google Video have further enhanced the reputation of top players.

JAPAN IS WIDELY accepted as the country that breeds the best players. Daigo, Ohnuki, BAS, Tokido, Chibita, RF, Kokujin and KO are just a few examples of the top names over the last few years. Relatively speaking, America has few players who can dominate, while Europe has even less. Geography plays a big part in this. It's no secret that for all competitive videogames the best players are produced by the best competition. Top FPS players Fatal1ty and Vo0 get to perfect their art by squaring off against international players via



Last year's Super Battle Opera finals for *Capcom Fighting Jam*, a game that has since died out…

Left to right: top Japanese players Tokido, Mago, Shiro and Iyo.



Defining Games

1. Street Fighter II: World Warrior

The one that started it all…

In the beginning there was *Street Fighter II: World Warrior*. The original sowed the seeds, but this was the sequel that saw them grow into a deep strategic title that exploded across arcades and gave birth to the fighting scene. Going back to it now shows it's not as balanced as legend makes it seem – with Guile in particular having a huge advantage over the rest of the cast. Yet the fact that it's shorn of modern additions such as tech-rolling, dashing, parrying and whatever else is what helps *Street Fighter II* keep its place among current fighting game titles. The *Super Turbo* incarnation perfected the formula, but it was *World Warrior* that kick-started the revolution.

online deathmatches. For fighting games, a genre intrinsically linked to the arcade since its birth, improving means being physically near the competition. Japan's density and high number of arcades means finding decent competition or attending tournaments isn't hard.

For America, the top arcades are Family Fun Arcade in California and Chinatown Fair in New York, which are at opposite ends of the country, making competition all but inaccessible for the fly-over states. Many American players visiting Japan say that there's even a gulf in skill between the players in Tokyo, who benefit from living close to the competitive arcade hotbeds such as More, and the players from surrounding areas such as Kyoto, who are handicapped by their need to travel.

The Japanese gaming culture is kinder to arcades – they're better run, actually understand their customers and are simply more abundant. In the case of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, famous Alex-player KSK actually owns his own arcade and routinely hosts ranking battles for the best players to compete in. If that wasn't enough, one of his employees is Kokujin, widely regarded as the best Dudley player in the world, managed to finish in the top eight at Evolution (or Evo) last year. Compare this to Casino arcade in London, where a *Virtua Fighter* fan bought a *Final Tuned* board out of his own pocket to be hosted in the arcade, and you can see the differences all too clearly. "Their community is much stronger than the American fighting game community," explains Justin Wong. "They have a hundred times more arcades than us. They also have the support from the arcades to run local tournaments every week. They have tournaments for every type of fighting game known to man. It's a lot stronger than what we have."

"**IN JAPAN** THERE ARE ENTIRE **ARCADES DEDICATED** TO CERTAIN GAMES"

DSP – SUPER STREET FIGHTER TURBO II, FOURTH PLACE AT EVO 2005

THE ONLY FIGHTING games that Japan isn't dominant in are *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* and *Tekken 5*. The attraction of the *Marvel* licence has seen a huge scene for *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* blossom in the US, while Japanese players haven't really warmed to it thanks to general unfamiliarity with the source material. Meanwhile, *Tekken 5* has been dominated by Korean players, although the Japanese have recently been on top of *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection*. Fortunately for American players, they regularly get a chance to clash



Chibita (middle) might not be the world's top *Virtua Fighter 4* player any more, but his eccentric style ensures he has remained the most prolific.



THE ICONIC CHARACTER

As one of Capcom's most popular and enduring characters, Ryu is significant in that he not only symbolises the *Street Fighter* series but also is immediately representative of the fighting game genre, possibly even the last hoorah of the arcade scene. His storylines have barely changed (Ryu travels the world to better himself as a fighter) and his move-set hasn't been touched (fireball, dragon punch, hurricane kick), yet ironically this is what has kept Ryu Capcom's most popular character.

As a familiar cornerstone when confronted with new faces and an overwhelming character choice, Ryu and Ken are the two characters with the 'shotokan' fighting style that anyone who ever played a *Street Fighter* game will be familiar with. Nearly every player taking his first steps toward advanced play will start with Ryu's classic crouching fierce punch into fireball, learn how to anti-air with his shoryuken (translated: rising dragon fist) and learn how to cross-up opponents with his medium kick.

Such was his pull that when *Street Fighter III: New Generation* was originally designed, Ryu was supposed to be ditched in favour of shotokan student Sean, hence the *New Generation* subtitle. Yet Capcom had a change of heart at the eleventh hour and put Ryu back in due to demand. It's true that some players prefer the flashier style of counterpart Ken and it's also true that Ken is often the better character from a technical standpoint – particular in later games – but it's Ryu who has endured as an icon for Capcom fighting games and in the arcade.

TOP PLAYERS SPEAKOUT

NAME: **DSP**
GAME: **Super Street Fighter II Turbo**
FAME: **Fourth place at Evo 2005**

games™. Why is Super Street Fighter II Turbo still played after all these years?
DSP: Well, it's a fundamental game that's pretty much at the root of most other fighters. Footsies, spacing, simple combos/buffers, juggles (the first *Street Fighter* game to have them), and super moves. In addition, it's one hell of a lot of fun to play. Although there is definitely a top tier, it's possible to play a lot of the cast at a tournament level and actually get wins. It's simple to jump into, but once you get deep enough it's also complex enough to play at a competitive level.

g™: Why have the Japanese been so much better at fighting games than everyone else?
DSP: Simply put, the gaming culture is different in Japan. For me, I have to drive at least 90 minutes to even FIND somebody who plays *Super Turbo*, and then I probably only play one or two people in a run-down arcade or at somebody's house on a sub-par console version of the game.

In Japan, gaming is a huge part of the culture. There are entire arcades dedicated to certain games – with competition present 24-7. Chances are you won't have to travel far – or often – to get competition in any game you choose there. The population is also much denser in the urban areas, so just by statistics there are more people available who are into games and playing on an active basis.

If the USA had an active arcade scene like Japan, and gaming was as big a part of our culture as it is over there, we'd be just as good, if not better than them. But it's not like that and I doubt it ever will be.

NAME: **NKI**
GAME: **Super Street Fighter II Turbo**
FAME: **Fifth place at Evo 2005**

games™: What is it about fighting games that makes them better to watch than other videogame genres?
NKI: I think it's because fighting games require more human emotion and instinct. You have to outsmart your opponent in fighting games, whereas with most other genres, you just have to do a particular task better than your opponent.

For example, in most racing games you don't really need to think about what your opponent is going to do; you just need to drive better and faster than him. In most puzzle games, you don't really need to predict your opponent's moves; you just need to clear the pieces faster than him. You may as well be playing against the computer.

In fighting games, you have to know what your opponent is going to do; you have to read his mind, react to what he does, and punish him for being predictable. It's for that reason that people will be afraid to do certain things ("I can't jump, because he'll Dragon Punch me"), and you can see that fear when people play. With fighting games, you can clearly see when someone is in a panic. It's real human emotion.

g™: How much of an impact do you think the Daigo parry video has had on the fighting scene?

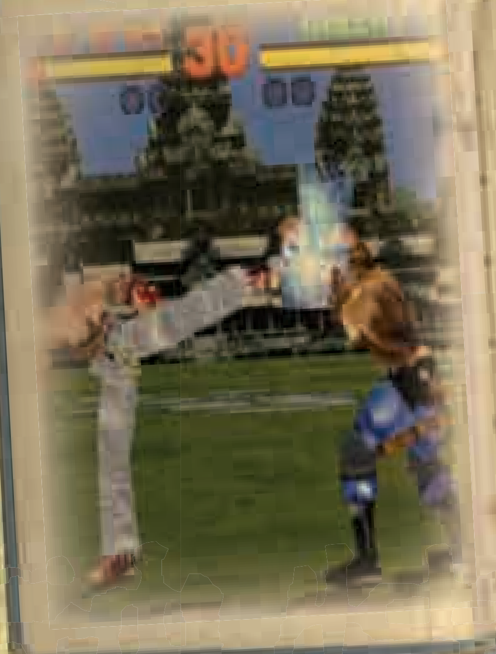
heads with top Japanese players as a side effect of bizarre gambling laws in Japan.

In America, tournaments are regularly held where a small entrance fee is paid into a prize pot that's often split 70-20-10 for first, second and third place. In Japan, however, this is against gambling laws, so the only way for Japanese players to earn decent money through fighting games is to travel. The only exception to the rule is Japanese tournament Super Battle Opera, which is a corporate-sponsored event that recoups money through DVD sales.

The big prize that every top player has his eyes on is Evo. Held in America, this tournament had a staggering 332 entries for *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* alone last year, and is going down the same corporate sponsorship route as Super Battle Opera offering over $65,000 in prize money across eight games. Cash rewards are huge incentives for Japanese gamers to travel, which in turn will spark the American and European players to journey for the rare chance to face-off against them. It's a classic 'I scratch your back, you scratch mine' scenario with Evolution looking to benefit with record attendances, proving fighting games still have legs.

THE CALIFORNIA CROWD is hushed. Sitting on the edge of their seats, they're watching the action on a huge projector while Justin Wong and Daigo battle it out for a place in the *3rd Strike* finals at Evo 2004. On the left, Justin Wong's Chun-Li has a Super ready to go. He's in full control of the match and moments away from securing an important victory. On the right, Daigo's Ken has no energy left and knowing the slightest touch will kill him, he's forced to keep a respectful distance. Justin's Chun-Li jinks back and forth from the other side of the screen, faking the Super, faking the Super… then the action pauses, the Super flash lights up and the crowd falls deathly silent. Chun-Li screams across the screen and unleashes a flurry of kicks in Ken's face, but Daigo calmly parries every kick, while the crowd start to roar their approval. Daigo keeps on parrying, the crowd continue shouting, and, incredibly, Daigo jumps to parry the last kick before crashing back down on Chun-Li with a medium kick, dragon punch and

> **"DAIGO'S PARRY IS HANDS-DOWN THE MOST AMAZING MOMENT IN SF HISTORY"**
> *NKI – SUPER STREET FIGHTER TURBO II, FIFTH PLACE AT EVO 2005*





2. Tekken

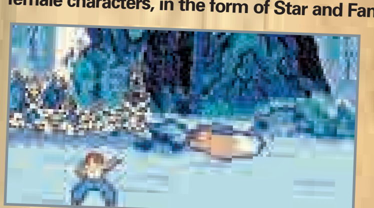
PlayStation's Champion

With a four-button layout mirroring Sony PlayStation's DualShock pad, *Tekken* was born in the arcades but preferred to call PlayStation its real home. The 3D graphics had been done before by Sega in *Virtua Fighter*, but this brought the accessibility and eccentric design to really draw in the masses. Learning the canned ten-hit strings via word of mouth became a mini-cult similar to learning fatalities in *Mortal Kombat II*. In a sign that things have truly come full circle and the arcade has been usurped, some cabinets for *Tekken 5* included ports for DualShock2 pads. In the same way that Americans dominate *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, Koreans dominate *Tekken* – though recent Japanese-dominated tournament results for *Tekken 5* show Japan hasn't quite given up the fight yet.

Genesis – The Origins Of FIGHTING

Yie Ar Kung-Fu

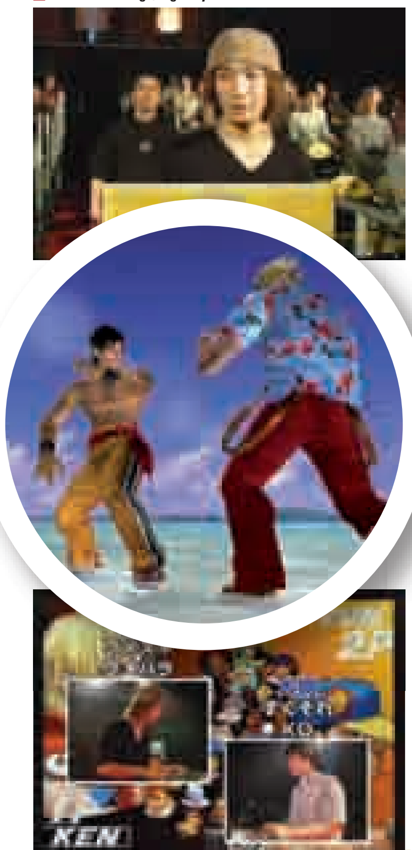
Most will argue that *Karate Champ* was the first true fighting game – with traits still recognisable in fighting games today – the action is housed in an 'arena', kept to one-versus-one with various moves available. However, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* is far closer in spirit to *Street Fighter* in that it featured eccentric character design through a wide variety of enemies. It's also worth noting that this was the first fighting game to include prominent female characters, in the form of Star and Fan.



Super to finish her off. Everyone erupts, screaming and clapping, knowing they've just witnessed something truly special.

This is probably the most famous video clip of any fighting game match out there, but it's a hugely important one because it revived flagging interest in *3rd Strike* when interest was sagging and the game was threatening to drop off the radar all together.

Ohnuki and Daigo, arguably the world's best at *3rd Strike*…



Daigo facing off against KO in the SBO finals last year.

With the video being circulated months before the game was released on Xbox via the *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* compilation, this was as close as Capcom ever came to recapturing the mainstream – fluky, viral marketing married to being in the right place at the right time. By association, other fighting games saw their community receive a much-needed jolt in the arm.

Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike remains by far the most popular fighting game, but beyond that the scene is scattered across *Marvel Vs Capcom 2*, *Guilty Gear XX*, *Capcom Vs SNK 2* and *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. With 3D games, it's down to *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection* and *Dead Or Alive 4* to hold the fort until *Virtua Fighter 5*'s imminent arrival.

Virtua Fighter has never really taken off in America and Europe, but it's a completely different story in Japan where it has proved immensely popular ever since its first outing – so much so that Japanese arcades will play top players such as Chibita to play against a hundred or so players simply to draw in more customers and bring kudos to that particular arcade. As for the other big name, *SoulCalibur III*, its popularity was hurt by the lack of an arcade presence, as Namco elected to keep it away from arcades until a belated Japan-only release in April this year.

WHY ON CONSOLE rather than arcade? Simply put, that's where the money is for developers – the shifting culture is also being reflected in the tournaments themselves, where the abundance of console conversions makes the crossover fairly easy. Evolution 2004 was the first noticeable step toward a console-only tournament causing huge uproar among the hardcore community. The reasons for doing so were logical enough; hosting tournaments on arcade hardware isn't easy any more, as fighting games have grown beyond CPS-2

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

BLOODY ROAR

Fighting games need a community to survive, with a healthy pool of players to provide competition for each other. For this reason, some of the stranger fighting games tend to fall by the wayside – Hudson's *Bloody Roar* series is a perfect example. This 3D fighter let you change into animals such as moles, werewolves, rabbits and stag beetles. It carved out its own niche simply because it was so bizarre, but it never really caught on. One of the better fighting games that was overlooked is *Rival Schools* (or '*Project Justice*' as it was known in NTSC characters), squaring off high-schools against each other, baseball players, football players, cheerleaders, PE teachers and school doctors all joined in the brawl. The abundance of infinite combos and ease of 'tardy counters' undermined its status as a possible tournament game, but it's perfectly good fun as an enjoyable, lightweight fighting game.



Incredibly, *Bloody Roar* has managed to secure PAL releases for all its sequels.



Despite the large number of infinites, *Rival Schools* remains a much-loved game.

TOP PLAYERS SPEAKOUT CON'T

NKI: That video had an amazing impact. Daigo's full parry is hands-down the most amazing moment in the history of *SF* tournaments. I still get chills when I watch that video.

I think for a lot of people it was the first time they actually saw The Beast in action. Reading online about how good Daigo is really doesn't do him justice. To think that anyone could have the composure to execute that full parry and follow-up combo in that situation, with Justin Wong next to you mashing his hardest to try to distract you, and hundreds and hundreds of people jumping up and down screaming at the top of their lungs is truly insane.

NAME: **BillyKane**
GAME: **Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike**
FAME: **European qualifier for SBO**

games™: Do you think European fighting game players will ever reach the level of Japanese players?
BillyKane: Right now, I think it's impossible for us to reach the level of the best Japanese players without actually living there. However, if more players start to practise harder and get more involved in the scene, we could get much closer and perhaps even beat them eventually.

g™: Why do you think fighting games are more popular in Japan than America or Europe?
BK: Their local arcades are alive and support the scene so that breeds a lot of new players. I hate to say it but arcades are a thing of the past in the West. But a lot of people tend to forget that the European scene has improved tremendously in recent years. Four years ago no one would have believed you if you said top Japanese players would make the trip to attend our tournaments.

g™: What's the biggest difference between Japanese and European arcades?
BK: To be honest, there are barely any decent arcades left in Europe. But if I had to give an answer, it would be better maintenance: the sticks and buttons aren't perfect but at least they always work.

hardware, the traditional one-size-fits-all choice. This makes gathering the necessary hardware a headache. It has been the main reason for the change, but there are further problems hosting arcade-only tournaments given the unreliability of the cabinets themselves. When a stick or button breaks, it means downtime fixing the cabinet. Finally, hosting on consoles, with players bringing their own stick, eliminates excuses and minor layout differences that mean players won't be at their best. American arcade cabinets tend to feature bat sticks and straight button layouts, as opposed to Japanese arcade cabinets with ball-top sticks and curved button layouts.

It also goes without saying that some players feel tournaments have to be held on arcade hardware to continue arcade tradition, yet it seems this is no longer up for debate. "The American Capcom community is vehemently opposed to all consoles," explains top *Super Turbo* player NKI. "The Dreamcast version of *MVC2* is virtually arcade perfect, yet when Shoryuken.com announced that *MVC2* at Evolution would be on Dreamcast, people were outraged for some reason. Granted, for other games (*Super Turbo*, *3rd Strike*, and so on) there are some differences, but unfortunately we'll just have to cope with what we have because large-scale arcade tournaments are just not feasible at all any more."

Likewise, online gaming is a very real threat to the flickering arcade flame. While current problems with lag leave much to be desired, as is evident in Live Arcade's *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting*, the fact that fighting games are making themselves known online via *Guilty Gear X2 #Reload*, *Capcom Fighting Jam*, *Capcom Vs SNK 2* and *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* shows what to expect in the future. Already, players such as JustOwnin, DOAMaster and TomBrady have made their names in the online arenas for *Dead Or Alive 4*, and are considered the big names for the *DOA4* tournament at Evo this year. It's highly likely that in the future we'll be talking about players who have made their names online as well as those who have made their names at big tournaments.

> "**ONLINE GAMING** IS A VERY REAL **THREAT** TO THE FLICKERING **ARCADE FLAME**"

THE TORCH HAS been passed. Capcom sparked the fighting scene with its humble *Street Fighter II: World Warrior* arcade game, but no longer wants to carry the burden. Its last attempt at a new fighting game, *Capcom Fighting Jam*, was a huge misfire that even its own hardcore audience shunned – a warning against any idea of *Street Fighter IV*. That leaves the future in the hands of fellow games *Guilty Gear*, *Tekken*, *Virtua Fighter* and *DOA4*, while Japan is still willing to pick up any fighting game – Super Battle Opera tournament featured *Samurai Shodown Tenka*, *Melty Blood* and *Hokuto No Toki*. *SF Alpha 3* is likely to catch on again too as Capcom released an arcade-perfect console conversion via its *Street Fighter Anthology* – already, *Alpha 3* is being discussed as a tournament-worthy game once more.

So new fighting games will be made, along with new names and famous moments such as the Daigo parry video. "Right now the scene is experiencing amazing growth," concludes NKI. "I think it will continue to get slightly bigger, then eventually level off, but I don't see fighting games dying out any time soon. Even if the game companies stop making fighting games, I doubt people will stop playing. Just like with chess, if the game is good there's no reason to stop playing it."



Defining Games

3. Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike

Let's get it on now

The current champion of the underground, with a staggering 332 entrants for the Evolution *3rd Strike* tournament last year, this is arguably the closest that two-dimensional fighting has ever come to recapturing the mainstream since *Mortal Kombat II*. The *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* that was released on Xbox in November 2004 featured *3rd Strike*, and the timing couldn't have been better; it was released at a budget price around the same time that the notorious video of Daigo parrying Justin Wong began to circulate on the Internet. The best piece of accidental viral marketing we've ever seen…



FIGHTER: Daigo GAME: 3rd Strike

Or, as he's simply known, 'The Beast'. Daigo Umehara became a known name in 1995, when he won a staggering 286 matches in a row in Vampire Hunter, at High Tech Sega Arcade in Akihabara. He then became the biggest name on the fighting scene when he defeated America's darling Alex Valle at a global *Street Fighter Alpha 3* tournament in 1998 in San Francisco. Since then, he's dominated *3rd Strike* and *Super Turbo* tournaments, and is widely recognised as the world's best fighting game player. The 25-year-old had gone into partial 'retirement' to work at a Mahjong parlour, but after hearing that there's over $65,000 prize money at Evo this year, he's been spotted having five-hour arcade sessions with best friend and last year's Evo winner Ohnuki in preparation for the tournament in Las Vegas.

FIGHTER: KO GAME: 3rd Strike



One of the few players to beat Daigo in a major *3rd Strike* tournament, KO is well known as the best Yun player in the world, and watching his Yun effortlessly switch pace from building meter for his Genei-Jin Super to relentlessly attacking is a joy to watch.Conspicuous by his absence at last year's Evo championships, KO is currently hitting pachinko and pachi-slot machines in Tokyo rather than the arcades, raking in the equivalent of between two and three thousand US dollars a month. This highlights the effect that Japanese gambling laws are having, but KO still attends Japanese tournaments, and it's likely that the huge pot at this year's Evo tournament will bring him right back into the spotlight.

FIGHTER: Justin Wong GAME: Marvel vs Capcom 2



Although he gave up his *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* crown to Duc Do last year, Justin Wong (middle) had previously won four *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* Evo titles on the trot. His dominant team of Magneto/Storm/Sentinel secured their status as top-tier characters in that game, and he's also branched out in *3rd Strike*, finishing runner-up to Ohnuki last year. Despite his success, Justin Wong has been booed at tournaments due to his turtling Chun-Li style where he'll wait for his opponent to make a mistake before pouncing, leading to slow-paced matches.

FIGHTER: BAS GAME: Capcom Vs SNK 2

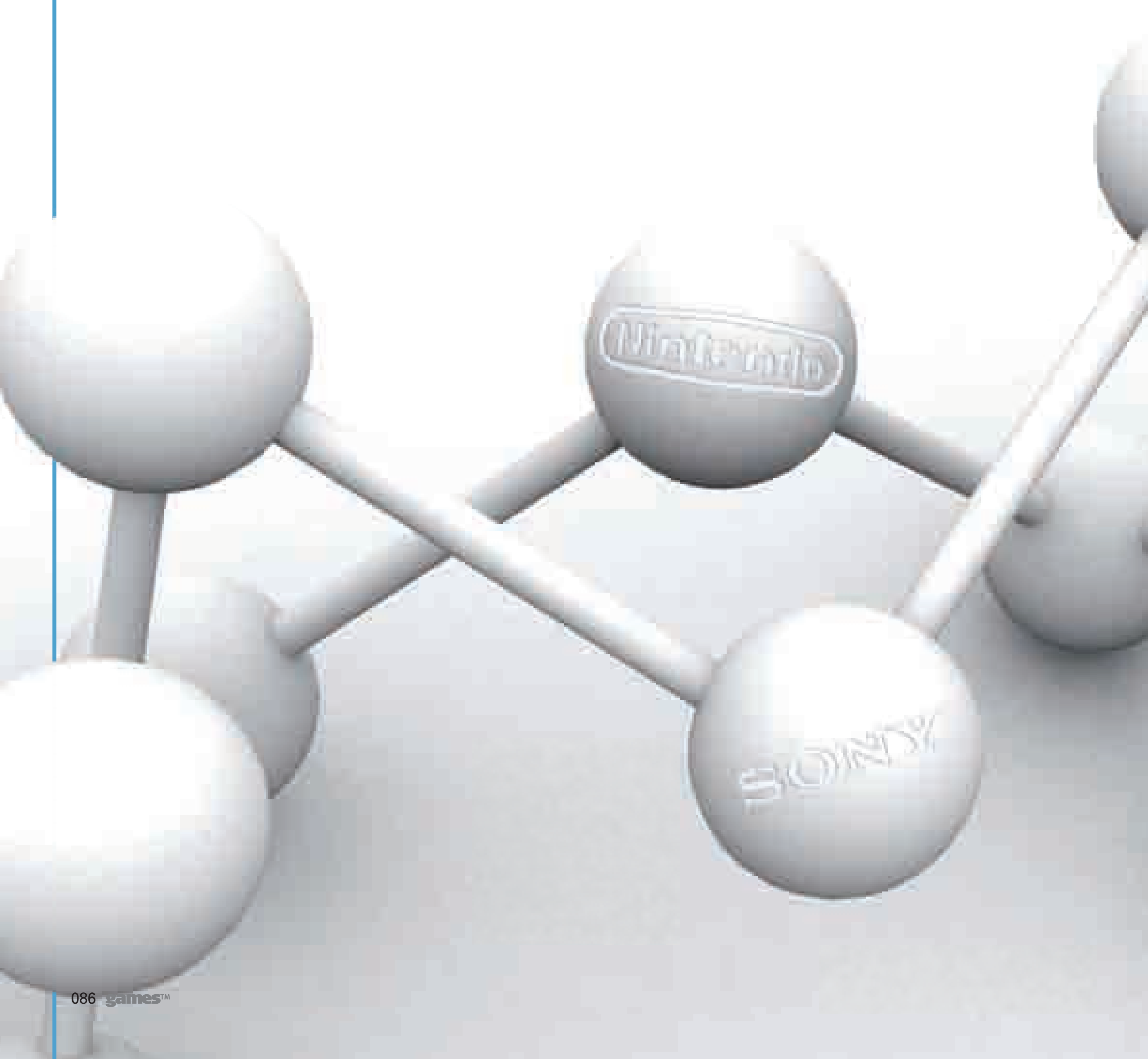


The Japanese player who popularised the A-Groove team of Sakura/Bison/Blanka, now said to be the best possible combination in a game featuring six different Grooves and 44 characters, secured his status as the best *Capcom Vs SNK 2* world when he won Evo last year. BAS (second left) is also well liked on the tournament circuit.

FIGHTER: Ryan Hart GAME: VF4 / Tekken Tag

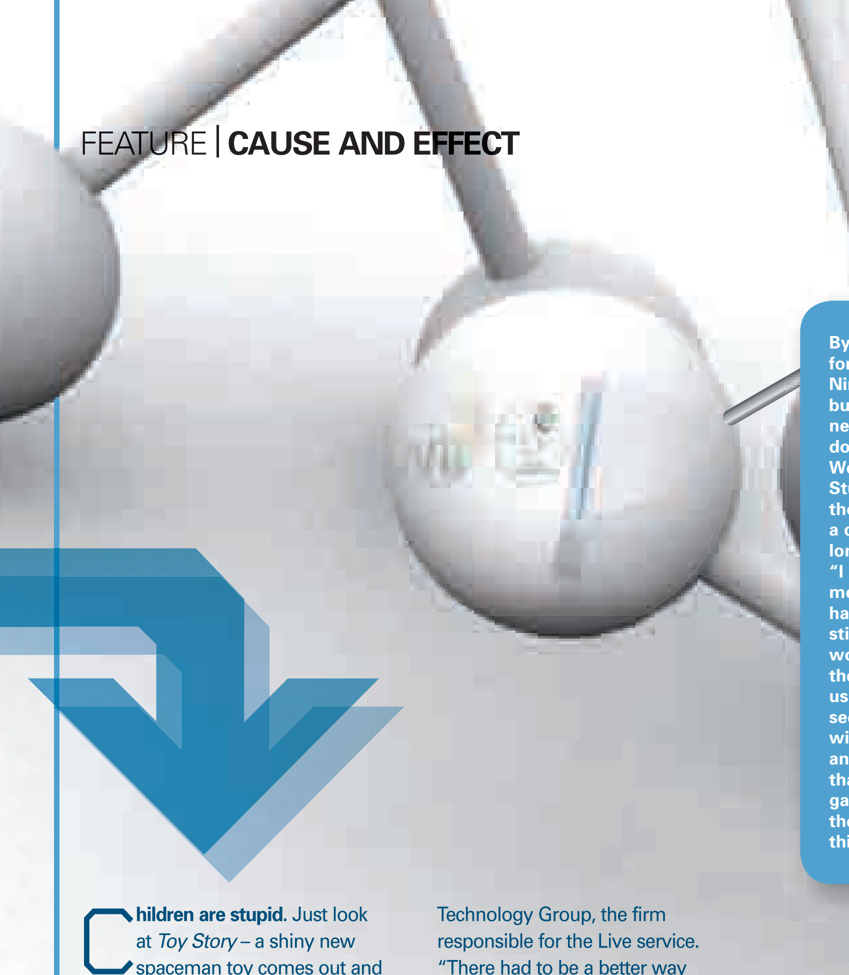
The UK's very own prodigal son is far and away the best fighter to come from our shores. Having made an impact in international tournaments for *Virtua Fighter 4* and *Tekken Tag Tournament*, Ryan Hart (middle) has also been competing at *Tekken 5* and *3rd Strike*, where he travelled to Super Battle Opera this year as part of the UK's team.

Cause and





And so another E3 comes and goes, filling the gaming world with excitement and anticipation of great things to come. But have we become so worked up about the future that we've taken the present, and recent past for granted? With the 'last' generation having offered so much, it seems only right that games™ takes a refresher course in just what brought us to where we are today…



By now, you've probably formulated your own opinion on Nintendo Wii, and that's good, but as you're no doubt aware, the new approach to playing games doesn't sit well with everyone. We spoke to Sony London Studio's Ron Festejo to see if he thought basing a console around a concept could be harmful in the long run…

"I don't think that it's a limiting move at all. Their new controller has some nice innovations but is still retaining features that you would expect to find on one of their normal controllers," he told us. "I think that Nintendo are seeing a change in the market with the likes of EyeToy, *SingStar* and *Buzz!* attracting new people that wouldn't normally play games. You need innovations like these to grow our industry and I think that they see that too."

SONY ON NINTENDO

Will it be sink or swim for Nintendo's hardware innovation?

Children are stupid. Just look at *Toy Story* – a shiny new spaceman toy comes out and everyone has to have one, instantly forgetting about all of their other toys. But hold on a moment. Isn't that exactly what we're doing today?

While the scuffed yet well-loved consoles that sit patiently beneath our screens can't really hold a candle to the shiny powerhouse that is Xbox 360 – Microsoft's very own Buzz Lightyear, if you will – to dismiss them as soon as newer versions are so much as mentioned is a damn injustice. We may be on the verge of the next generation, but we're not fully there yet and wouldn't be anywhere near if it weren't for the achievements, successes and indeed shortcomings of the current wave of consoles. As such, PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube and even you – yes you, oh lovable Dreamcast – we salute you.

You could pick any number of crucial games or events out of the air, but arguably the most important event of the last generation was the November 2002 launch of the Xbox Live service. While commonplace among PC gamers, online gaming on consoles had never before been as organised or as simple as Live made it – and indeed continues to make it.

"We're gamers too, and knew the state of online gaming when we started the Xbox Live project. It was chaos," explains Scott Henson, product unit manager with the Game Technology Group, the firm responsible for the Live service. "There had to be a better way that people would get excited about. And they did – from the very beginning. And before we knew it, as we exited the first holiday of the Xbox Live service in 2002, we were at nearly 250,000 paying subscribers." It's from its humble beginnings as somewhere to meet up and chat with friends online over a game of *Midtown Madness* or *Rainbow Six 3* that today's more rounded and complete Live service has evolved.

BUT EVEN WITH the timing spot-on to catch the broadband explosion, the success of Live was still unlikely to be assured. "We never had a doubt that the ideas we had for Xbox Live were solid, but as many folks in our industry know, great ideas are not always enough to make something successful," Henson tells us. "Many people that I talked to early on doubted that gamers would be willing to pay for a unified service, that voice would be a big deal or that broadband was the right bet. When you hear enough of this doubt, sometimes you start to wonder if maybe you're a little crazy. But to innovate, you have to be a little crazy."

And if it's 'crazy' to plug plastic guitars, bongos, mats and microphones into a console, the whole world is obviously insane – and we wouldn't change a thing. Peripheral-based games are no new concept, but with Xbox, PlayStation2 and GameCube, developers seemed eager to take things to the next level. The clunky mech silliness of *Steel Battalion* takes the award for Most Ridiculous Peripheral; the twin sticks clocking in at some £130 and sporting more buttons than your average keyboard, despite the fact that you only ever really need a few of them.

Elsewhere, games like *Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* were experimenting with using handhelds as game controllers, an idea that Sony has already made clear that it'll be pursuing with PS3. Sony itself even managed to combine gaming and karaoke to wonderful effect with its hugely popular *SingStar* series, as well as bringing quiz games home with *Buzz!*. But its most impressive creation wouldn't see the player holding microphones, buzzers or controllers – it would invite people to use their entire bodies as a controller.

While easily dismissed on the grounds of its novelty value, EyeToy is nothing if not an interesting insight into what the future could hold. "A specific peripheral will always be more popular than your traditional controller, but it relies heavily on the type of game," explains Ron Festejo, producer with Sony's London Studio. "For example, we introduced the idea of the air guitar in *EyeToy: Play 2*. As fun as it was, something like *Guitar Hero* comes along and offers you a proper looking guitar that you can put

around your neck. It's tactile, it's brilliant and people get it straight away. They make an instant connection with it. It works better than playing it with a controller or an EyeToy."

But with the EyeToy technology very much in its infancy, it seems likely that we'll see the popular little camera going on to bigger and better things next generation, expanding beyond simple movement detection according to Festejo. "There are of course other technologies such as colour tracking, background subtraction and face tracking, which we've experimented with in some way on our EyeToy products. These technologies are still growing and can definitely be improved upon in the future and it's something that our group is investing a lot of time and effort in."

BUT IF WE'RE looking at this 'generation' as a timeframe, there's another factor to take into consideration, namely 'handhelds'. With PSP and DS, we have an intermediate generation all to itself – portable machines that sit equally as happy alongside a new wave of more powerful home machines as they do with the current ones. DS developers will continue to find new ways to base games around the hardware, while high profile PSP releases will almost always dazzle gamers with their beauty and solidity. In a way, it's a perfect pairing. You can't really compare the two machines as they jostle for the Game Boy's handheld crown almost in the sidelines while home machines take centre stage.

As the home market for this generation began to wind down as Microsoft's new machine loomed, both Nintendo and Sony had been shoving their handhelds down the nation's throat. But could this change in priorities actually have been an attempt to draw attention away from the stampeding next-gen gambit that was Xbox 360 and drain the pockets of consumers before launch?

Either way, it didn't work. Late last year, Microsoft's new console launched onto the scene with all the subtlety of a hippo in a paddling pool. It was an instant hit. Release lists immediately started to dry up on

LARGER THAN LIFE

Three games that changed the industry for ever

HALO

Like *GoldenEye*, and *Half-Life* before it, Bungie's first Xbox title set a benchmark for the popular FPS genre, and an entire generation of games would end up getting compared against it. The game more or less sold the Xbox, especially in the US where it seems shooting things with big guns is extremely popular.

SINGSTAR

The simplest of concepts but one that has inspired countless younger sisters around the world to turn on a PS2 for the first time. Grabbing a whole new audience and getting them into gaming was a major coup for Sony and one that Nintendo will be hoping to repeat with Wii.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Our third and final game has a lot to answer for. As well as teaching kids that it's okay to kick prostitutes to death, Rockstar single-handedly invented the sandbox genre with a title that went on to inspire more games that we could possibly keep track of. Hands down, the most influential title of the generation.



existing console line-ups (or stay dried up in the case of Cube), and impulse purchases started being shot down by phrases like 'I'm waiting for PS3/Wii'.

So has it been a case of too much, too soon? For Xbox to be superseded after just three and a half years seems almost criminal and while PlayStation2 has had a good innings, it still shows promise with stunning titles like *God Of War*, *Okami* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*.

Everyone seems to have their own idea of whether this early start for the next generation is a curse or a blessing, but what is heartening to see is some degree of continued support for older platforms.

With the incredible installed user base on PS2 and Xbox compared to the fledgling 360, it's surprising that it isn't still being tapped as much as it could and indeed should. Microsoft's obvious priority toward Xbox 360 means that first-party Xbox games are a thing of the past while PS2 owners can look forward to a year that will bring *God Of War II*, *Final Fantasy XII* and *Kingdom Hearts II* among many other treats.

WITH ONLY REALLY PlayStation2 looking to hold some degree of promise for those not yet ready to embrace the next generation, it's pretty fair to say that like it or not, the curtains are closing on the current generation. This time next year, it'll be all about 360, PS3 and Wii. Expect to see budget developers and publishers cashing in on this generation shift just as happened with PSOne – with backwards compatibility rife, old consoles often go the same way as hand-me-down clothes, leading to whole new markets to exploit.

Aside from a few remaining titles, it's approaching the time to welcome the next generation with open arms whether we think it too soon or otherwise. But at the same time, we'd be foolish to overlook the substantial progress that's been made toward a better, more diverse gaming future by this generation.

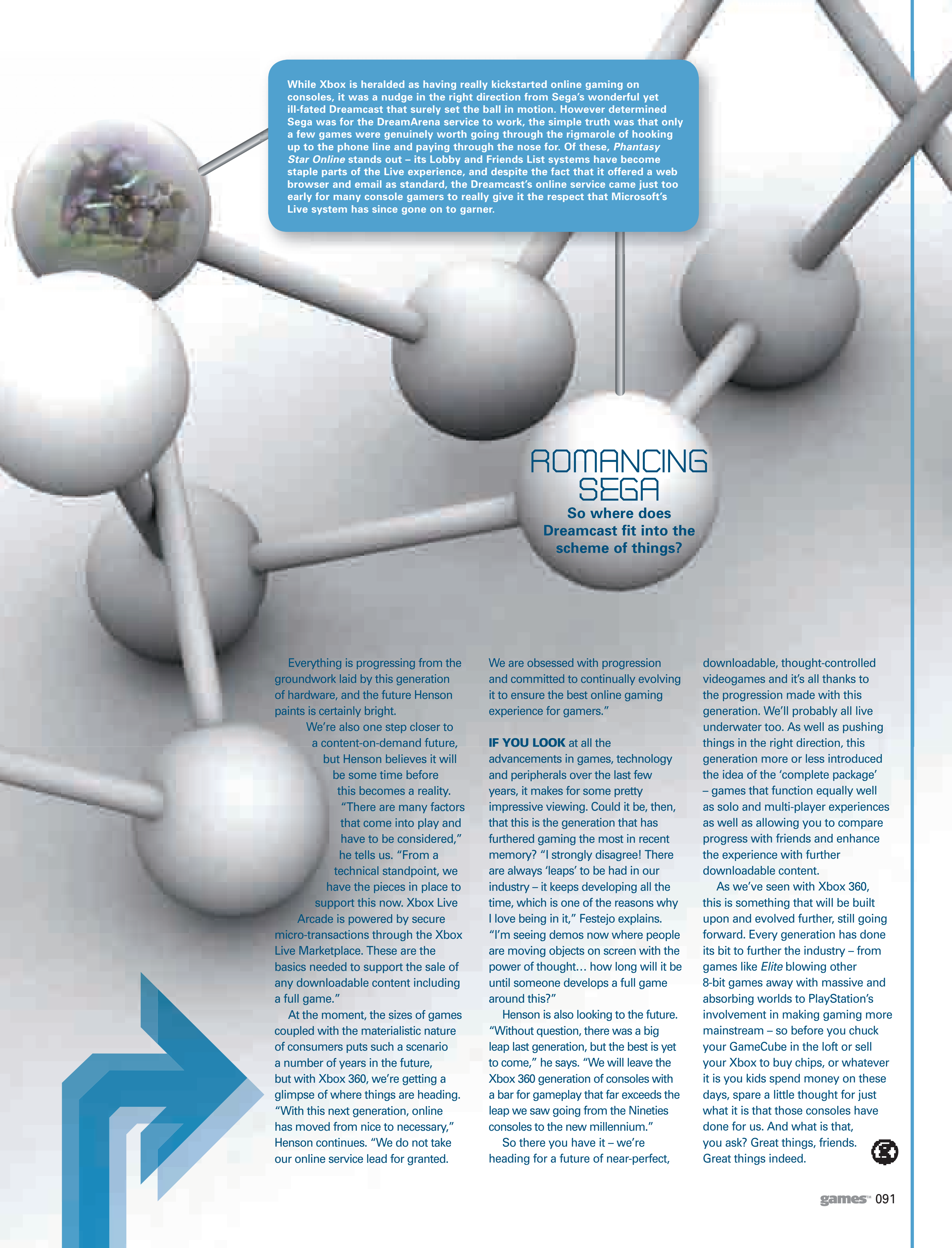
"Games are driving the demand for high-definition entertainment," observes Henson, an interesting point given how advanced gaming is compared to other media in terms of making full use of the expensive televisual revolution that is 'high definition'. "Customised experiences are prevalent throughout games: AI and physics will continue to exceed people's expectations while new input types like touch screens and wireless devices will create new ways to interact with our systems."

THE ONLY WAY IS UP

The future of Live is in safe hands…

With the tricky part out of the way, and millions of subscribers happily gaming away on Xbox Live, what will the future hold for the service? "The Xbox Live service will continually innovate, evolve, and get better and better over the life of Xbox 360," GTG's Scott Henson reassures us. "That's the beauty of the architecture of the system. From adding support for platform features like background downloads and video chat to continually adding new content in Xbox Live Arcade and the Xbox Live Marketplace, we are committed to seeing Xbox Live be the best online gaming experience for gamers and to continue to bring new and exciting ways to play."

Doubtless, anyone who has had access to the E3 demos and trailers through Live can see where Henson's going with this and there can be no denying that it's a giant stride in the right direction.



While Xbox is heralded as having really kickstarted online gaming on consoles, it was a nudge in the right direction from Sega's wonderful yet ill-fated Dreamcast that surely set the ball in motion. However determined Sega was for the DreamArena service to work, the simple truth was that only a few games were genuinely worth going through the rigmarole of hooking up to the phone line and paying through the nose for. Of these, *Phantasy Star Online* stands out – its Lobby and Friends List systems have become staple parts of the Live experience, and despite the fact that it offered a web browser and email as standard, the Dreamcast's online service came just too early for many console gamers to really give it the respect that Microsoft's Live system has since gone on to garner.

ROMANCING SEGA

So where does Dreamcast fit into the scheme of things?

Everything is progressing from the groundwork laid by this generation of hardware, and the future Henson paints is certainly bright.

We're also one step closer to a content-on-demand future, but Henson believes it will be some time before this becomes a reality. "There are many factors that come into play and have to be considered," he tells us. "From a technical standpoint, we have the pieces in place to support this now. Xbox Live Arcade is powered by secure micro-transactions through the Xbox Live Marketplace. These are the basics needed to support the sale of any downloadable content including a full game."

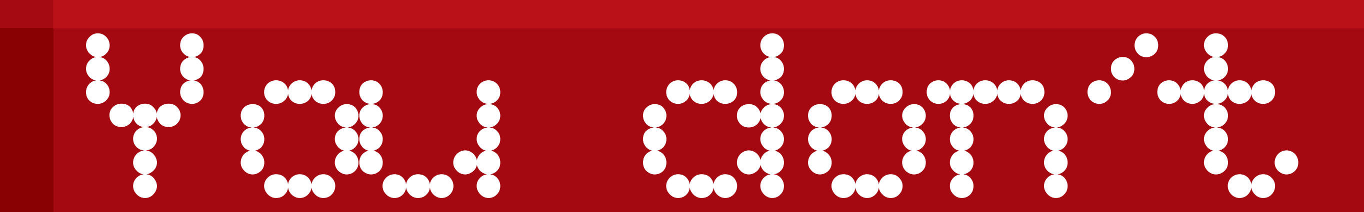
At the moment, the sizes of games coupled with the materialistic nature of consumers puts such a scenario a number of years in the future, but with Xbox 360, we're getting a glimpse of where things are heading. "With this next generation, online has moved from nice to necessary," Henson continues. "We do not take our online service lead for granted. We are obsessed with progression and committed to continually evolving it to ensure the best online gaming experience for gamers."

IF YOU LOOK at all the advancements in games, technology and peripherals over the last few years, it makes for some pretty impressive viewing. Could it be, then, that this is the generation that has furthered gaming the most in recent memory? "I strongly disagree! There are always 'leaps' to be had in our industry – it keeps developing all the time, which is one of the reasons why I love being in it," Festejo explains. "I'm seeing demos now where people are moving objects on screen with the power of thought… how long will it be until someone develops a full game around this?"

Henson is also looking to the future. "Without question, there was a big leap last generation, but the best is yet to come," he says. "We will leave the Xbox 360 generation of consoles with a bar for gameplay that far exceeds the leap we saw going from the Nineties consoles to the new millennium."

So there you have it – we're heading for a future of near-perfect, downloadable, thought-controlled videogames and it's all thanks to the progression made with this generation. We'll probably all live underwater too. As well as pushing things in the right direction, this generation more or less introduced the idea of the 'complete package' – games that function equally well as solo and multi-player experiences as well as allowing you to compare progress with friends and enhance the experience with further downloadable content.

As we've seen with Xbox 360, this is something that will be built upon and evolved further, still going forward. Every generation has done its bit to further the industry – from games like *Elite* blowing other 8-bit games away with massive and absorbing worlds to PlayStation's involvement in making gaming more mainstream – so before you chuck your GameCube in the loft or sell your Xbox to buy chips, or whatever it is you kids spend money on these days, spare a little thought for just what it is that those consoles have done for us. And what is that, you ask? Great things, friends. Great things indeed.

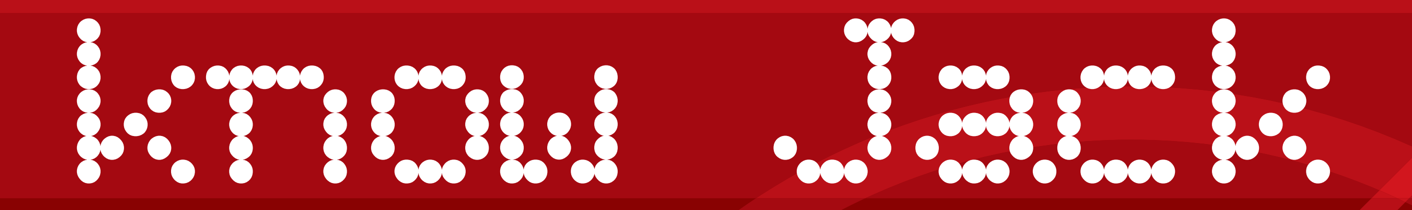


You don't





Jack Thompson has become a hated figure in the games industry, but how much of what you 'know' is based on fiction and what on fact? games™ goes to the man himself to find out exactly what's on his mind...


know Jack





Opportunist. Puritan. Hate-mongerer. Asshole. Jack Thompson has been called many things by anti-censorship campaigners, the gaming press, and gamers themselves. He has become the father who thundered that videogames were evil, the schoolteacher who confiscated your Game Boy, the bully who pounded you for quoting *Wing Commander* in class. In the videogame industry, no man is more reviled.

So what does he want? Is he out for blood? Does he think videogames should be banned? Apparently not. "All I've said," Thompson explains, "and the only issue at root for me in all of this, for six years, is that unlike in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and now Japan, in the United States, unfortunately, if a game is labelled inappropriate for someone under 17, you can still sell it to that person. It's nonsensical. It's an anomaly." Ladies and gentlemen, it would seem Mr Thompson is guilty of a truly heinous crime: not wanting five-year-olds to stomp hookers to death on the outskirts of Los Santos, San Andreas.

Why, then, have we turned against him with such vigour? And how does he feel about it? "Oh, they've been far too kind," he laughs. "I've got a bad temper. I am not a perfect person, and certainly, those who are my enemies – and believe me, the industry is collectively my enemy – are going to point out what my flaws are, and they're probably correct in identifying them. So, to the extent that they help me by pointing out my flaws, I appreciate it. I understand the 'I Hate Jack Thompson' t-shirts, and they're entitled to sell them and so forth, but when it goes beyond the point of that to targeting me for death threats, and people actually calling and using computer-generated voices saying 'we're coming over to your house right now to kill you', that's not what democracy is all about. It really is 'shoot the messenger.' The bad news comes from someone like me about what's wrong with the industry, and they think I'm the problem. There's going to be a movement and there already is a movement in government to move in on the videogame industry. And I'm not the author of that; I've been trying to warn them that it's coming. But they make it out to be, 'Here we have runaway Jack Thompson, enemy of Western culture.' They think I really am the enemy of freedom. But as a history major, let me make this point: it's fair to suggest that most people think there's an increasing licentiousness in this culture, not rampant censorship. I think that anyone who says the Western world is perilled by censorship is certifiably insane."

HIS POINT RINGS true: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is 22 years late, and if *GTA: San Andreas* is any indication, it won't be here for a long time. While he's not in favour of stopping violent games all together, Thompson does admit he's afraid of what kind of effect a Rockstar-dominated industry will have on culture at large. "Dan Houser, Rockstar's creative vice president, was interviewed in the *New York Times*. He said that, eventually, Rockstar's games would be considered culture. He didn't say 'pop culture'; he said 'culture'. So, we get it: *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* will one day be right up there with *The Merchant Of Venice*. That's how out of touch with reality and how, frankly, uneducated these people are. They know the price of everything and the value of nothing. They're technologically adroit and morally bankrupt."

"In the long run, I think I'm the person who's trying to maximise the freedom of the creative arts, but there's got to be responsibility that goes with this technology. The Greeks said that real art is what points to what is beautiful, good, or true. I don't think you can say that about Rockstar. If they want to call themselves 'creative' and 'artistic', then they've got to live by the rules of what the arts are. They have to take the power of their art seriously. When Houser says, 'this is one day going to be culture', the scary thing is that he's probably right. So he'd best be careful about what kind of culture he's creating. You know, we're in a so-called 'War on Terror'. The President has called it that. Of course, one of the great and certainly most visible means by which radical Islamists recruit to their causes is the argument that America is 'The Great Satan'. They talk about America's exportation of its cultural sewage to the rest of the world. And when you look at something like Rockstar Games, and what they dump into the lives of kids everywhere, what's the rebuttal to their argument?"

'A MODEST VIDEOGAME PROPOSAL'

Thompson's best remembered faux pas was his challenge on the industry last October. He sent a letter entitled 'A Modest Videogame Proposal' to sites such as GameSpot and GamePolitics as well as the Entertainment Software Association's Doug Lowenstein. It challenged the game industry to, "create, manufacture, distribute, and sell", a game in which a father, whose son was killed by a 14-year-old gamer, embarks upon a revenge crusade killing prominent members of the industry including 'TakeThis' CEO, 'Paula Eibeler' (a play on Paul Eibeler, CEO of TakeTwo – a man Thompson had previously called a "sociopathic criminal"), attendees at E3, 'TakeThis'



HATE MERCH?

Those 'I Hate Jack Thompson' t-shirts really exist, you know; they're sold by popular American videogame webcomic *Penny Arcade*. It's only fair, however, to give a little background – Thompson actually wrote several letters to various police departments and senators trying to get the comic's writer Jerry Holkins and its artist Mike Krahulik arrested after they sent him an email about their videogame charity Child's Play. Thompson consequently contacted them via telephone, and it's fair to say that communication from both sides was hardly civil. The letter that Thompson sent to the Seattle chief of police alleged that the *Penny Arcade* staff had been harassing him, stating that, "there are a bunch of computer geeks out there who think they have a right to paint targets on your back and on your officers' backs… I look forward to working with your fine police department to shut this little extortion factory down and/or arrest some of its employees". Thompson also contacted VGCats.com comic author Scott Ramsoomair following the publication of one of his comics which parodied Thompson in the Hot Coffee scandal – Ramsoomair hasn't, however, featured his Jack Thompson encounter in any of his merchandise.

Thompson's concern, obviously, stretches to Rockstar's upcoming excrement-stirrer, *Bully*: "I think it is, in some ways, the most bizarre, over-the-top, and dangerous game anyone's ever come up with, because in this country, the word 'Columbine' means something. The FBI and the Secret Service here both did their threat assessments in the aftermath of Columbine, and they concluded that the two common denominators in most of the school killings were bullying and the immersion of the perpetrators in violent entertainment. And so here you have a game that allows the victims of bullying to become the über-bully. Psychologists say that, rather than something like *Bully* being an escape valve for that type of behaviour, it's a rehearsal of it. So of course when you have a generation of kids playing a bully simulator, you're going to get some bleed-over into reality from virtual reality."

WHAT THOMPSON DOESN'T point out is that playing a game like *Bully* will also, no matter how subconsciously, condition children to associate the school environment with violence rather than education. So why has America been so slow to prevent its sale to children? "Well," Thompson says, "there is a duality in the American ethos that has always created tension: liberty and virtue. The founders talked about it, they said one is indispensable to the other. Unfortunately, in America there is an extraordinary imbalance between the two. We've basically got an anarchic view of life and society that's very ill-informed and is certainly not historical. It confirms what many people perceive to be the character of the ugly American: indulge oneself in all things, have no curb on the appetite for anything, and export this selfish hedonism to the rest of the world."

"ANYONE WHO SAYS THE WESTERN WORLD IS PERILLED BY CENSORSHIP IS CERTIFIABLY INSANE"

"Also, I think a lot of people who don't play the games – the adults who are running the show – don't know what's in the games. The media have been loathe to depict accurately and fully the sociopathic violence in a game like *Manhunt* because they're afraid it will offend. And it's hard to convey in the abstract the violence present in the games. Beyond that, I think there's an incredible stupidity where people think that whereas food that you put into your stomach can pollute your body and make you unhealthy, somehow what you dump into your brain has no effect on you whatsoever. Of course what you put into your head has an effect on you. Otherwise, let's take every kid out of every school everywhere on the planet, because education has no effect whatsoever."

Finally, Thompson blames key government and extra-government officials for America's failure to implement a legal ratings system similar to elsewhere. "I think it's been folly for the leaders on this issue in government and outside of government to think that just because you put a label on something it deals with the problem," he argues. "To quote Churchill again – sorry, he's one of my heroes – 'most people, when they stumble across the truth, pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and move on as if nothing had happened.' The liberal approach on this type of issue is to label it and think you've done something about it, and move on as if your labelling of something proscribes it. It doesn't. In fact, in this country, the labelling has been counterproductive, as it's been a marketing tool. If you put an 'M' label on a game, a kid will want to buy it. I'm a Republican, so it pains me to say this, but sometimes it does take societal action and government intervention."

Of course, for those who've been swept up in the media's vitriol, you might not know exactly where Thompson thinks intervention is required. For those who've missed out, Thompson sees Rockstar's games as dangerous because of their messages to the player. "So many people have said," he notes, "'he who tells the stories defines the culture.'

Violence is a fact of life. I think it's dangerous to immerse oneself in it, and it is still in itself problematic, but the story can give it purpose. The story and message of *San Andreas* is that you can be a sociopath and win the game. When you kill innocent people, and you kill cops, and you stomp women to death, and identify people by colour or racial or ethnic group, that's a message that no kid should get. It's not just violence; it's the sociopathic message that's wedded to it. You're being rewarded for violence that is divorced from any sense of morality. In other words, gratuitous violence: engaging in violence itself for no other reason than because it's pleasurable. The argument goes, 'Well, we all played cops and robbers, and there's violence in John Wayne movies', and so on. But the violence even in the *Terminator* movies, for example, is to be engaged in for a moral purpose.

IN A MILITARY sense soldiers are trained when to use force and when not to use it. We've got the Geneva conventions and rules about military mayhem. We've got rules that not only define a just war but also how to wage war. There are things you just don't do. There are very few things that you don't do in a game like *Manhunt*. So, I think that the problem is that you've got kids who can't necessarily put violence in context by virtue of their tender years. When you feed them the notion that violence is good in and of itself, rather than a regrettable thing that you sometimes have to engage in to defend yourself or a higher purpose, or whatever, then you're giving a message that is definitely sociopathic."

The message is not only sociopathic but, according to Thompson, downright insulting: "There's a condescension that is almost beyond belief in the *New York Times* piece I mentioned. Houser said that, and I'm paraphrasing, 'We want to give people games in which they can rather easily engage in the violence, and not make it too difficult, because these people are failures in their lives, and they have enough failure, so we want to give them success in the violence.'"

"Now that, to me, pulls away the veil as if he were the Wizard of Oz. It shows what his attitude is to these people who have given him a nice living, and that is 'you are losers, we are going to take advantage of your loser status, and we're going to give you what we want you to have, and that is murder in a virtual setting that is very easily achieved.' That's not only sadism; that is an elitist view of another human being, which is rather disturbing. The way they market their stuff and the way they treat classes of people, like police and so forth, indicates a dismissal of human kindness, and it's expressed in the games."

It's not just Rockstar's oeuvre that Thompson's worried about, however. He also concedes that, while war games don't carry *San Andreas'* sociopathic message, he's still irked by them. "They do seem to make war seem cool and fun," he says. "That's why the military is using *America's Army* and the *Navy SEALs* game as recruitment tools. They want to convince teenage boys to join the army because war and the military are 'cool'. But the fact is that to kill has a very horrific psychological cost that's very scarring. And killing, whether it's murder or in the context of a just war, is something to be avoided, in real life and virtual life."

As a result of this, Thompson believes that the result of prolonged exposure to this material by children could be disastrous. "Kids literally process those games in the mid-brain – the medulla, the posterior singulate, and in other parts of the brain that lead to copycatting. And in the MRI scans, you can see these parts of the brain light up – they don't light up in adult brains. There's this neurological deficit that is the scientific basis for the intuitive sense, that any parent has, that kids aren't ready for certain types of entertainment. So that's the scientific basis for what we identify as a problem, and that's why we need to keep kids away from adult material as long as we can."

When Thompson says "adult material", you probably know, by virtue of Hot Coffee, that he's not only talking about violence. More and more, we're seeing pornography – not just sex – pop up in our favourite entertainment medium, to the point where *Playboy* itself feels the need to sponsor a game. How does he feel about this? "I have quite a quaint view of sex," he smiles. "It's the pornographer and the creators of



defence lawyers and employees of GameStop and Best Buy. He outlined his proposal in a very strongly worded manner, challenging "videogame moguls" to "target yourselves as you target others. I dare you". In return, he offered to pay $10,000 to a charity of Paul Eibeler's choice. Of course, several homebrew games were developed following the proposal, including *I'm Ok*, a very accurate interpretation of Thompson's proposal by a new company calling itself 'Thompsonsoft', which matched every requirement set out in the letter. Thompson then claimed that his proposal was satire and that he would not donate any money to charity – so *Penny Arcade's* Mike Krahulik donated $10,000 to the Entertainment Software Association in his name.



PIXELANTE

Thompson's lasting legacy to the videogame community is likely to be the term he coined in October 2005: 'pixelante'. Its etymology is fairly obvious – it's a portmanteau of pixel and vigilante. In his letter of complaint to the FBI about the level of email abuse he was getting from the huge number of stupid gamers who decided to fight his accusations with death threats and violent statements, which was forwarded to numerous gaming websites, Thompson officially defined pixelantes as "sociopaths with mouses" and "pimple-faced geeks who are using the First Amendment and freedom of speech in order to threaten me". Intended as a derogatory term for fanatical gamers, it was immediately seized by the community, who turned its meaning around and made it something of a badge of honour – indeed, the anti-defamation and gamer activism organisation Pixelante Nation is named after it. Pixelante t-shirts are available in various incarnations – the one pictured left is the design by Michael Bleigh that won a contest on GamePolitics.com.

"KILLING IS SOMETHING TO BE AVOIDED, IN REAL LIFE AND VIRTUAL LIFE"

these games who say, incorrectly, that the person whom they would call a prude thinks sex is dirty. I happen to think that sex is wonderful and is not just for procreation, but for pleasure and expression of love. I think sex is fabulous and needs to be treated as an intimate act rather than a public act. These games, as an extension of pornography, also depict sex as something you do to somebody rather than something you share lovingly and tenderly with someone."

Mind you, he freely admits he's made a mistake in the 'sex and games' area – specifically, his comments on *The Sims 2* containing "full-frontal nudity, including nipples, penises, labia, and pubic hair." He acknowledges, "I got some of the facts wrong in my statements about *The Sims 2*, but here's what I've eventually got right, which is expressive of my concern – and in fact the ESRB now agrees with me. They have warned the industry that, to the extent that you as a developer allow mods to be used on your game, to make available to the public inappropriate material, then you are to be held accountable for that failure or that use of your game in that fashion. Let's say that EA doesn't enforce its copyrights. To the extent that EA encourages and allows people to use the name 'Sims' and to modify their source code and to come up with mods that Will Wright says he supports. Then, to that extent, they're involved and collaborating in some of the pornographic mods that are out there."

DOES THIS SPELL the demise of the mod industry, you wonder? Fear not, because when we asked Thompson whether he'd be satisfied with some kind of interface being implemented that restricted children from accessing inappropriate mods, he said, quite simply, "Yeah. I think that's in fact what the ESRB has said." So chill, dude. Listen to some Brian Eno and calm down.

In fact, the videogame industry as a whole should probably calm down a little and listen to what Thompson actually has to say. He's not the mad, art-destroying Luddite that we've all made him out to be. In fact, the root of and inspiration for his passion against inappropriate entertainment being sold to children is quite simple: he is a family man. "My son is 13," he says, "so he's right in the age group where kids are interested in this stuff. He does play some of what I would call 'benign' games, and very little. He's seen daddy and what daddy's committed to and I think he accepts it and I think he substantially agrees with it, which is not to say we don't have a disagreement at the videogame store. But he'd never go to the videogame store without me. I wish more parents would do that."

"By the way, though, that's not the whole answer. The problem is this: I can keep my son away from these games, but I can't keep other people's sons away. When I was on *60 Minutes* in 1999 and Ed Bradley asked Joe James (one of the three Paducah victims' sets of parents) 'Isn't it the parents' responsibility?', he looked at Ed with tears in his eyes, and said, 'You know, Ed, I'm trying to figure out what I did wrong. I put my daughter in school and she was in a before-school programme, and if I hadn't raised her right, she'd still be alive today.' So I can keep my kid away from this stuff, but I can't with other kids."

In the end, no matter how you look at it, and no matter how many obscenities you can hurl at his email address, there's no doubt whatsoever that Jack Thompson does have a point. Why are we defending the indefensible? Why are we supporting the *Carmageddon*s over the *Grim Fandango*s and the *Planescape: Torment*s? We certainly hope there's more to gaming than controversy. A 'get smart' attitude in the industry might actually end up helping it rather than killing it. Plus, if we can segregate adults' and children's titles, then we're allowed much more creative freedom in the former. So, on that note, we have a new term for Thompson to add to the list: concerned father.



The Players

TWO NEW CONSOLES WILL SOON BE WITH US, EACH ARRIVING WITH ITS OWN FANFARE. PC GAME DESIGN SPECIALIST KRISTOFFER WARDAAHL WILL BE WATCHING FROM THE SIDELINES, CONFIDENT IN HIS CHOSEN FORMAT…

KRISTOFFER WARDAAHL

MOST WANTED ENTERTAINMENT

With the industry currently bubbling over with excitement in anticipation of PlayStation3 and Wii, it's hard for PC titles to get a look in when it comes to new launches, which is a little unfair. Sure, consoles are about to embark on an all-new adventure – an adventure which is looking to result in some truly exciting times for us gamers – but PC developers push their ever-evolving technology with every new project undertaken, and there's certainly also a fair number of impressive looking projects on the way. A large bound in visual quality is substantially less impressive to those who see it far more frequently than once every three years, and Kristoffer Wardaahl, *Joint Task Force* designer at Most Wanted, certainly doesn't rank these graphical enhancements as highly as many consumers seem to…

"Cutting-edge technology is very important since it's a big part of our medium," Wardaahl begins. "But it should never be the backbone of the game experience, only one of its elements. A game is never great because of its graphics or feature list. The core gameplay is much more important. On the other hand, it's harder to get hype for any game that lacks eye-candy." It's a good point. No matter what the gameplay, in recent years at least, games providing an impressive amount of this 'eye-candy' have managed to climb to the top of the charts using little more than clever promotion.

The question of who will have the better visuals is something that Sony and Microsoft have been bragging about for some time now – but surely today's PCs are more than capable of rivalling a console when it comes to looks? There shouldn't be any contest at all – technology-wise the PC format is in a far better position. "Its easy to mix up high-resolution textures and shaders with technology," Wardaahl explains. "Essentially, I don't think a console platform can achieve any significant graphical advantages over the PC – or only for short periods at best. It's not like they are built using alien-tech or something. PCs are highly modular and constantly upgradeable, while a console takes years and years of development before it reaches the point when the engineers let go of their baby – and when it's done it stays that way."

It's for this very reason that we've seen many PC developers shrug off the threat of consoles – even in a time when MMO and RTS games are being primed for release on various other machines. These developers could well be right, though – and experience is proving this. RTS titles, such as Most Wanted's *Joint Task Force*, fit perfectly onto the PC, whereas putting distance between yourself and the screen – as you do when playing on a console – changes the environment sufficiently and manages to overhaul the entire experience and impact of the game.

"I don't think the PC will rival consoles in a standoff in any way," Wardaahl informs us. "They are for different audiences and have different capabilities. Most of the younger gamers out there might favour a console, while a more mature audience, and most of the girls out there gaming, seem to favour the PC."

Girls you say? Interesting. To be honest, we can see the appeal of *Nintendogs* and *Brain Training* luring in the female of the species in a far more effective way than any hour-absorbing MMORPG, but maybe there are some new tricks in the pipeline – something to really reel in the masses. The future of gaming is a far more open subject when you're dealing with PCs, but everyone we've spoken to seems sure that one element in particular will be playing a very large part in the way we play. Unsurprisingly Wardaahl is no different… "Online, online, online," he cries with surprising volume. "And I'm pretty sure that strategy games and shooters will be kings on the PC as long as the mouse is the premier interface." Having played *The Battle For Middle Earth II* on 360 recently, we agree and far prefer the effective control method the PC offered. When it comes to this form of game, a mouse will always have the advantage over a pad.

Anything else we should be looking out for? "Well, I think the social development of gaming needs to be addressed as well," he continues. "And that will definitely decide the direction of games and gaming culture. Right now, it's perfectly okay to make games for teenagers where they can saw off policemen's heads with chainsaws, but it's absolutely taboo to show some vaguely booby looking textures. I'm pretty sure this will be addressed at some point – and I'm definitely not implying the need for pornographic games – just a general change in attitude and censorship."

Joint Task Force *is out Q4 '06 on PC and was previewed in issue 44.*



"CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY SHOULD NEVER BE THE BACKBONE OF THE GAME EXPERIENCE, ONLY ONE OF ITS ELEMENTS"
KRISTOFFER WARDAAHL

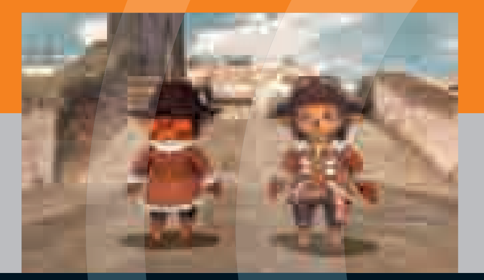
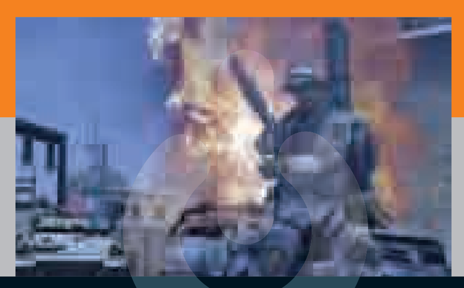
IT'S THAT TIME FOR US AGAIN WHEN WE TAKE A LENGTHY LOOK AT ANOTHER RECENTLY RELEASED BATCH OF XBOX LIVE GAMES TO SEE IF THE ONLINE ASPECT OF THE TITLE FURTHER ENHANCES THE SINGLE-PLAYER EXPERIENCE OR CONFIRMS OUR ORIGINAL THOUGHTS. THE LIVE REVOLUTION CONTINUES WITH THE LATEST PRETENDERS TO THE XBOX LIVE CROWN…

ONLINE ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

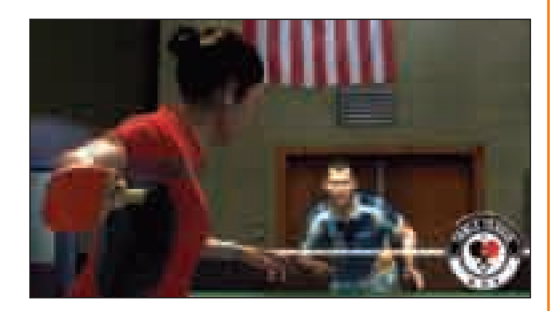
TRIED & TESTED

The summer is upon us, but the inescapable draw of online gaming threatens to keep tans from arms and sunglasses from eyes. Microsoft has been kind enough to bestow a firmware update on its adoring 360 devotees, meaning that (finally!) downloads can be pushed to the background while playing. A host of smaller upgrades involving music and movie playback have helped further cement Xbox Live as the premiere online gaming service. What better time than now to examine the latest batch of Live-enabled titles?

Xbox360 LIVE TEST

EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…



ROCKSTAR GAMES PRESENTS TABLE TENNIS

ROCKSTAR'S SECRET WEAPON EXCELS ONLINE

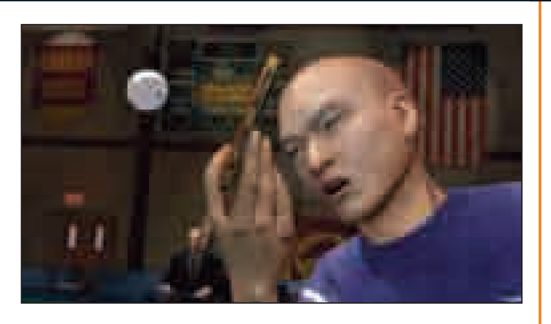
Nobody thought it was possible, but somehow Rockstar has managed to maintain the super-fast speed of *Table Tennis* for the online arena. Even during the occasional moments of lag, shot input is still recognised so rallies are never interrupted. Most excellent.

As you may expect, the tension and competitiveness of the game translates perfectly to Xbox Live, and as you may also expect, the game's community is, on the whole, very pleasant. With a Spectator mode (Table Tennis Network), an excellent Lobby system and even a timed Tournament mode there's very little to fault in Rockstar's table tennis. Apart from Jesper. The lanky Swede with a flash of blonde hair once again threatens to ruin *Table Tennis'* balance (as he also does in single-player). He's just too powerful and, unless you have a mastery of spin, far too difficult to combat. Lesser players use him and win. He is beatable, but it becomes a war of attrition – not fun at all.

Still, Jesper or not, *Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis* is exactly the kind of experience we expect on 360. Comprehensive, smooth and thoroughly entertaining.

8/10

FAR MORE FULFILLING THAN THE OFFLINE MODES





TOP SPIN 2

NO FRILLS, NO PROBLEMS

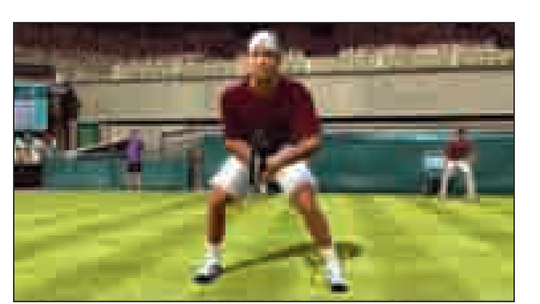
This is a prime example of a perfunctory online component. Smooth and lagless, with good menus and lobbies, playing Top Spin 2 online is exactly how it should be – like playing it offline.

After the disappointment of *Virtua Tennis 3* this month, we can now verify that this is the current pinnacle of digital tennis, and as such provides an excellent break from all the *Battlefield*, *Burnout* and *Ghost Recon* action. With the height of the tennis season upon us – as we speak, someone not English will have surely won Wimbledon – nothing beats a quick rally against a random Frenchman or surly American.

The real treat comes in the form of online co-op doubles. As with *Pro Evo*, or a *Halo 2* double-team game, sitting with a buddy as you overcome the foreign threat is a triumphant gaming experience. In fact, there's little upon which to fault *Top Spin 2* apart from the fact that it is *Top Spin 2*. A great game in its own right, but unlikely to hold your attention for more than a couple of matches at a time, and with no tournaments or Spectator mode, it won't be long before those Xbox Live mainstays return to the disc tray.

7/10

SOLID AND ENJOYABLE

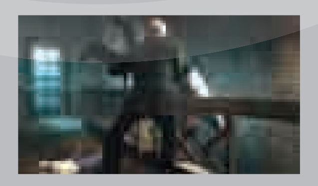


Try Me

THE LATEST SLEW OF MARKETPLACE DEMOS

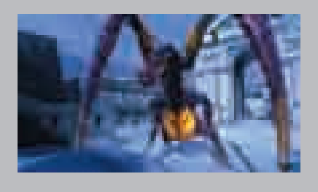
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

A brief but satisfying taster of Agent 47's fourth outing – a game that has since gone on to top the sales charts. Proof, if any were needed, of the impact a Live Arcade demo can have on a game's success.



LOST PLANET

Two levels of icy brilliance: one against vile insects, the other against vile space pirates. You literally couldn't ask for more. *Lost Planet* looks set to continue Capcom's excellent action-adventure track record.



MOTOGP '06

A lovely online demo that's more than a little reminiscent of the original *MotoGP* Live demo many moons ago. 15-player online races with people of all skill levels is a recipe for entertainment.



Xbox360 LIVE TEST

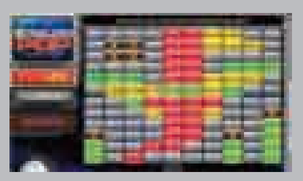
ONLINE ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

Penny Arcade

WHAT'S NEW IN THE WORLD OF XBOX LIVE ARCADE

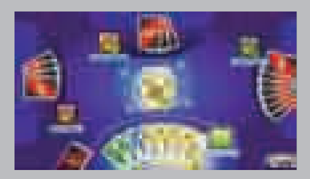
ASTROPOP

A fiendishly difficult puzzler from the mind behind *Bejeweled 2*. Matching coloured blocks is a mainstay of puzzle games, but poisoned blocks that infect their neighbours certainly aren't. Great but incredibly tough.



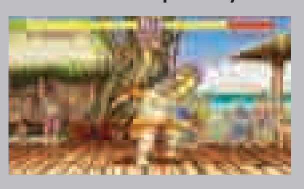
UNO

The classic card game translates superbly to Xbox Live. A perfect 'conversation game' displayed in crystal-clear high-definition. It's not exactly the pinnacle of digital entertainment, but then it was never supposed to be.



STREET FIGHTER II: HYPER FIGHTING

We're still waiting. This has been promised for so long it seems like the *StarCraft: Ghost* of Xbox Live Arcade. Hopefully this will be in circulation by the time you read this, and we won't have to complain any more.





FINAL FANTASY XI

MASSIVELY TIRESOME

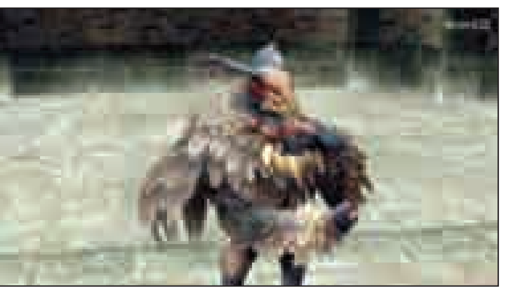
As an MMORPG, *Final Fantasy XI* is fairly bread-and-butter in how it goes about its business. The class system that allows for sub jobs – and later on advanced jobs – keeps things interesting and lends itself to lots of cute experimentation with party configurations. Linkshells further the feeling of camaraderie – and the classes are well balanced so there's a role for everyone. There's the usual mix of legendary monsters and rare items to ensure there's always a carrot dangling in front of you once you hit the higher levels.

This may be all well and good, but the problem lies in the 30 or so hours it takes to get there. You need inhuman patience to get through the low-level grinding, which feels woefully dull, unfair and unnecessary. The complete lack of handholding and sign posting at the start of the game is a real turn-off and leaves you using the online community as a crutch. Persist and you'll find a coherent if fairly rudimentary MMORPG waiting at the end of the grinding. However, with *Phantasy Star Universe*'s imminent shadow looming large, it's best to hold fire and wait before deciding to throw away valuable hours of your online gaming life.



5/10

NOTHING SHOULD BE THIS MUCH OF A GRIND





BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

WAR HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN

Although almost identical to the Xbox version (save for the extra maps and graphical improvements), *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* is nevertheless thrilling online fare. A great game for stories – the scope for user-created set pieces is immense, helped no end by the vastly improved ragdoll physics. Storming a base with a pal, shooting down a chopper with a sniper rifle, killing all your team-mates with a poorly timed artillery strike… it's all in there, every bit as enjoyable as it was on Xbox.

Our sole gripe with 360's *Battlefield* is communication. A recent update has helped matters, but it's almost impossible to co-ordinate any tactics over the mic because most people's voices cannot be heard by other players, even with the comms button held. This makes games more of a free for all than we would like, and detracts from the experience as a whole. It's hard to play the game as it is meant to be enjoyed – a deep tactical affair – and thus makes *Recon* the game of choice for the more thoughtful shootist. Nevertheless, *Battlefield* is tremendously entertaining, and testament to the lure of Xbox Live.

8/10

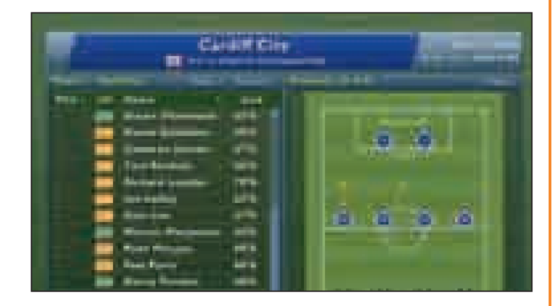
BAD COMMS, BUT GREAT GAME







EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

CAN THE GREATEST FOOTIE SIM SUCCEED ONLINE?

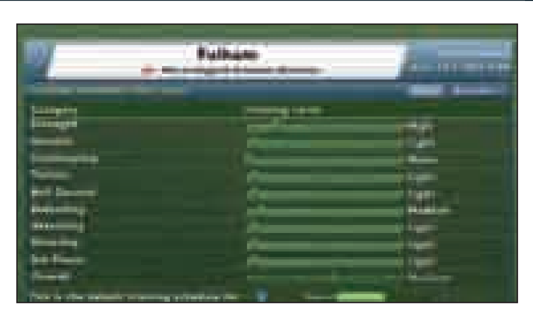
One of the most addictive strategy games in history, SI Games' sublime footie management sim is the story of endless hours, heated emotions and much geeky debate within the *FM* fraternity. While almost faultless as a single-player, the success of the Xbox Live community meant *FM 2006* would inevitably feature online content, but how, and to what degree of success? Well, very little as it turns out.

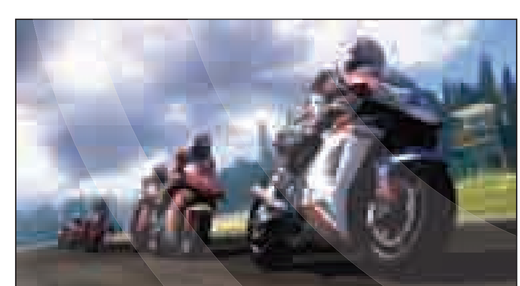
Allowing up to 16 players to enter a knockout cup or eight in the league, the game functions similarly to the single-player, with news, injuries, team morale and so on affected during the competition. Players can export any team – as well as any match tactics – from their single-player set-up into a Live game.

The lobby system, while easy to use, demonstrates just how few people are playing *FM* online (ranked or unranked), as most are probably playing the preferred single-player. Once into a match-up (usually against a mate), the length of time spent waiting on your opponent and the competition to run becomes frustrating to the point that we'd prefer not to bother. *Football Manager* is best confined to single-player, with *Pro Evo* the superior source of online competitive football.

4/10

GREAT OFFLINE. NOT SO GREAT ONLINE





MOTOGP '06

A TEST OF SKILL, REACTIONS AND BALLS

Tearing your two-wheel death machine around the multiple track (Grand Prix mode) or street circuits (Extreme mode) gives new meaning to fear-fuelled racing online. After enjoying the single-player aspect last issue – apart from the lazy slow down and semi-annoying screen tear – we took to the Live circuits to pit our skills against any online noobs foolish enough to enter our lobby.

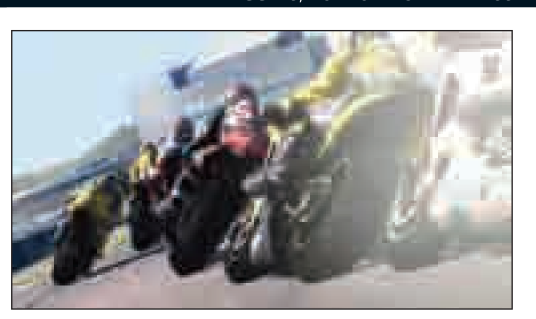
Choosing between the generic Player and Ranked lobbies you can change all manner of options, with the Extreme class a particular highlight of the Ranked lobby. Each of the four Extreme classes are accessible from the start.

The racing itself is enjoyably fast and furious, with frequent changing of positions and verbal grief from your opponents – even the slow down and screen tear seem less noticeable. Two additional modes are playable (Tag Team and Stunts), with the former almost identical to *PGR3*'s excellent Capture The Track mode, and the latter points based with awards for wheelies, powerslides and general skills.

Sadly there's also the odd network clash when joining a lobby, along with headset problems akin to *Battlefield 2*.

7/10

A FEW NIGGLES, BUT FUN NONETHELESS

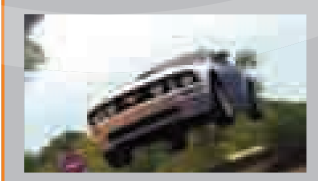


Looking Forward

THE NEXT BIG XBOX LIVE HAPPENINGS…

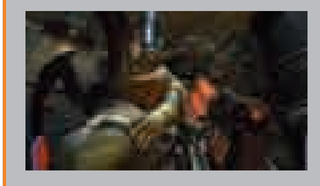
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

A hands-on demonstration at Atari's pleasure was enough to get us sufficiently excited for the world's first MMO racer. Now scheduled for September, this could quite easily be the next big Xbox Live title.



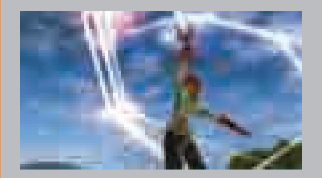
PREY

The single-player is a mammoth achievement, pushing back the boundaries of 3D space and positively brimming with ingenuity. It would seem the multi-player is set to do the same.



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

If ever there was a title to show *Final Fantasy XI* how it should be done, then surely this is it. If it can capture the camaraderie and atmosphere of the Dreamcast classic, then there's no reason to look elsewhere.



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning that scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

REFERENCE KIT

All the PC content for the magazine is tested on the über-specced Alienware Area-51™ 7500 extreme performance desktop PC. For information on Alienware products, point your browsers to www.alienware.co.uk or call them freephone on 0800 279 9751.





There's a good number of beasties waiting to kill you. And they will. Kind of…

PREY

CHANGING THE WAY YOU LOOK AT THE HUMBLE FPS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
2K Games

DEVELOPER
Human Head

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
14 July

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
Intel Pentium 4 2.0GHz/ AMD Athlon XP 2000+ processor. 512MB system RAM. 100% DirectX 9.0c compatible 64MB video card. MS Windows 2000 or XP.

A surprise is possibly one of the greatest things in life. If you think about it, we spend an awful lot of time simply being content with the expected. Foolish of us really, as it's neither big nor clever to romance an ideal of mediocrity for the sake of not making waves. The FPS is a classic example of our needless tolerance of this. Men and women will rave about over-hyped, generic title X while blissfully unaware that it offers nothing of any real value – nothing that *Doom* failed to present several years ago, at least. This ado, however, is unavoidable due to the limits and constraints that developers are forced to work within when developing such a title. Once graphical overhauls are taken out of the equation – something that's essential when perched on the border of the next generation of machines – you're left with what? A deeper plot? Better control? Originality is the obvious answer, but where do you go? And when you find a direction, how far can you push recognised and accepted boundaries before your title begins to stretch too far, and the core – the very thing that attracts the masses to these titles – becomes unrecognisable?

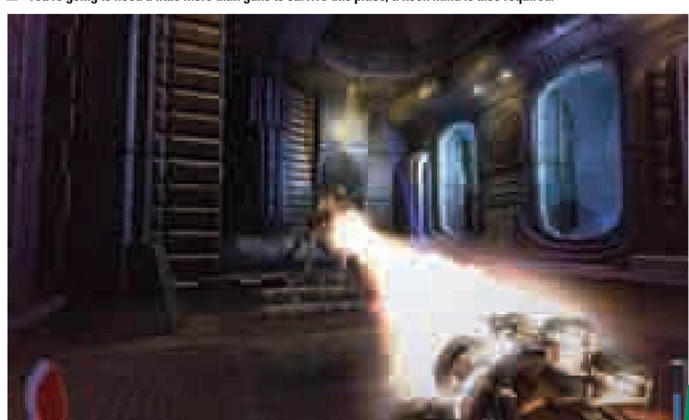
Fortunately, there's little need to spend time answering these questions. *Prey* has attended to all of them in a far more pertinent way than we could ever achieve with words alone. This game has other tools available to make its point. It has no spatial limitations. It embraces the nonsensical. It has surprise. Surprise – as we mentioned 262 words ago – is a very good thing.

The story simmers in the background as you progress. You're a Cherokee chap who goes by the name of Tommy – he has a range of spirit powers thanks to his beliefs that he doesn't actually believe in. A load of aliens turn up in a 'Sphere' and take him, his girlfriend and his grandfather away. It turns out that these aliens are harvesting the Earth and are going to kill everyone. Explaining any more would only serve

You're going to need a little more than guns to survive this place; a keen mind is also required.

FRIENDS INDEED

No first-person shooter is complete without a decent Deathmatch option nowadays, and *Prey* offers exactly what you'd expect, but with maps that twist your brain that little bit more than usual. As well as plenty of upside-down, wrong-way-up, portal-hopping action, you can choose to hunt for your pals in your spirit form – an ability that gives you the chance to kill enemies in one shot, but leaves your body in a vulnerable state. It's a nice touch and gives us all something different from the norm – as if it were needed in this title – but we're sure it won't be long before players start finding a way to exploit this horribly.



The weaponry is one of the most impressive aspects of the game. A lot of effort has certainly been put in.



Portals look harmless but could lead you to your death. They probably will. A sort of death, anyway.

to further reveal the overall story – something that's actually notable for its depth and level of immersion – so we'll leave it there, but knowing of the inclusion of this 'not-so-regular Joe' and his 'Sphere' prison are essential to understanding how the game works.

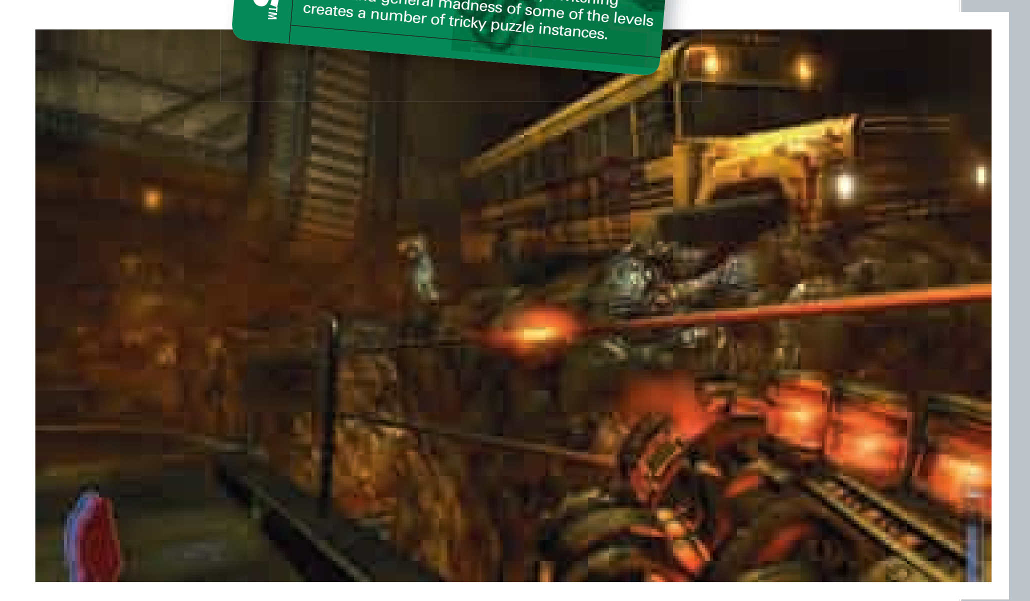
First stop, Tommy's 'Spirit Walk' power. Of the game's features this is probably the most basic and predictable. When aiming to create a unique title, one of the first – and occasionally only – things a development team will do is give the key characters a special ability. It allows for puzzles and events that go beyond walking left and right, opening doors and shooting things. Be it bullet time, some form of 'rewind' or a 'Rage mode', these abilities tend to form the base for a title's extra-curricular events, and the Spirit Walk is no different. At the press of a key, you will leave your body and play as Tommy's spirit. In this form, you are capable of killing foes with your surprisingly more-powerful-than-a-sniper-rifle Spirit Bow, walk along invisible paths and pass through most force fields and barriers. More important, though, is your spirit's ability to press buttons. For all the splendorous skills your spirit is capable of, a simple button press is what provides the most use – largely because this particular alien structure was constructed around the use of buttons. Many situations will see you having to leave your body and – in the simplest of circumstances – walking

gamesTM

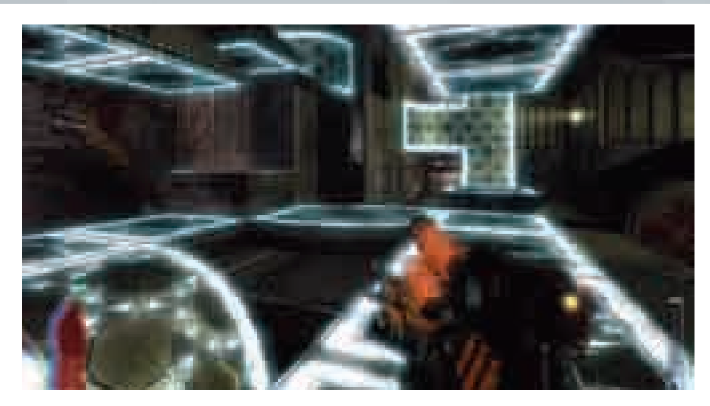
FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

RIDDLE ME THIS: Although plenty of the usual FPS action is available, the gravity-switching antics and general madness of some of the levels creates a number of tricky puzzle instances.



"THE ENVIRONMENTS IN PREY ARE DESIGNED TO MESS WITH YOUR HEAD. FULL USE IS MADE OF EVERY INCH OF YOUR SURROUNDINGS"





■ This doesn't look too threatening until you realise that you can walk on all the white paths. You can go anywhere in search of the exit.

through a force field to get at the 'off' switch on the other side. As things progress, these situations become more complicated and all of the 'Sphere's' quirky charms come into play – and there are plenty of them.

The environments in *Prey* are designed to mess with your head, and this is the title's key charm. Gravity shifts and you can walk up walls. Sometimes you shrink to fit inside a glass cube, other times you'll engage in a firefight with enemies that are running amok on the ceiling. This is a game where full use is made of every inch of your surroundings. In some cases, more of the environment is used than actually exists. A good example of this is when we – seemingly stuck and beginning to get a little frustrated – discovered a box with a whole new room within it. Once you get used to this way of thinking and realise that the levels aren't strictly dictated by objects and doors that are laid out directly in front of you, you fall into the real game of *Prey*, and that's when things start getting especially interesting and enjoyable.

Prey certainly has a lot to offer in terms of originality and innovation – especially when you consider the staleness of the genre – but it does tread a very fine line and is close to toppling headfirst into the realms of frustration. So how does it manage to keep you playing? It's down to something that we would normally frown upon: linearity. When dealing in so many dimensions, the ease of getting lost is extreme. Without paths being blocked and doors locking behind you, you could well be wandering the walls and ceilings of your prison for hours without reasonable progress. We actually like the somewhat linear nature; it's essential for the title to work. However, this causes a new problem for *Prey*: ease of completion. For a game that's spent so long in development, *Prey* is surprisingly easy to conquer. It's not particularly short, but the fact is you can't die. Couple this with the aforementioned linear approach and you have something that makes quite a hefty difference to gameplay.

Well, we say you can't die, but you can. It's just that you don't die for very long and you come back exactly where you were when you did go out but with more energy. It's all to do with a short mini-game in the Spirit World that brings you back to life as often as you want, but it kind of defeats the point in dying at all as there seems to be no penalty whatsoever. This makes the whole game little more than a test of patience and persistence. But, for all the

■ The fact that this enemy is upside-down soon becomes less bizarre, and you find yourself staring at the ceiling an awful lot.

FAQs

Q. SO YOU REALLY CAN'T DIE?
A. Not really. Losing all your life is still fairly annoying though.

Q. HOW ANNOYING?
A. Unless you really enjoy shooting glowing bird things, very annoying.

Q. SO THAT MAKES IT TOO EASY?
A. Kind of – though Cherokee mode is still as tough as you like.



games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

THE GOOD FIGHT: The biomechanical selection of weaponry available in *Prey* may not be the vastest we've seen, but it's certainly one of the most peculiar. Only *Stranger's Wrath* can rival it.

FLY BOY

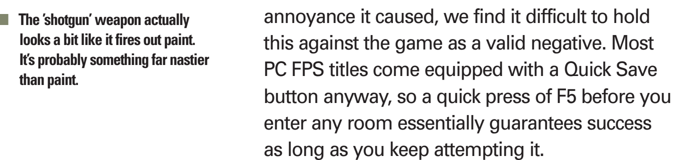
At various points throughout *Prey*, you'll be required to indulge in a little piloting. Although at first these sections provide a pleasant break from the usual action, they soon become a little irritating as they have far less direction than the rest of the game. Usually a linear approach would be a bad thing, but, as we explained in the main text, when you're trapped in a sphere where gravity and logic make little sense, a little handholding is required, and when the hand is taken away the moment you enter a vehicle you really notice the difference. It is worth persisting though; these sections are few and far between, and what lies beyond them is definitely worth the effort.



It turns out that you need much more than a simple wrench to stop a massive machine from killing all of your friends and family members in a horrible manner.



The 'shotgun' weapon actually looks a bit like it fires out paint. It's probably something far nastier than paint.



annoyance it caused, we find it difficult to hold this against the game as a valid negative. Most PC FPS titles come equipped with a Quick Save button anyway, so a quick press of F5 before you enter any room essentially guarantees success as long as you keep attempting it.

Is this any different from not being able to die at all? Maybe the puritans out there will disagree, but we've all resorted to ever-so-slightly-cheap Quick Saves to get past a tough section or mission, haven't we? This really is more an issue for people playing Xbox 360, and save points play a much larger role in console gaming, but as it's the PC version we're reviewing it won't affect the score. Let's just say that if we were focusing on the 360 version, you may have seen a slightly lower number at the bottom of this review – probably a seven.

Simply put, *Prey* is a masterpiece of design, but there are a few niggles that slightly mar the overall experience rather than the immediate game. It's likely that you won't even notice them until you've finished playing and are debating its merits with friends. With years of development time, you'd have hoped someone somewhere would have spent a little more time looking at how the game played out rather than all the interesting things the game could contain. But hey, there are few better games in the genre, and with everyone competing for 'Best Looking Game' at the moment, it's nice to see a studio thinking outside, inside and all around the box. We like. And there's a very good chance that you'll like too.

“IF WE WERE FOCUSING ON THE 360 VERSION, YOU MAY HAVE SEEN A SLIGHTLY LOWER NUMBER AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS REVIEW”

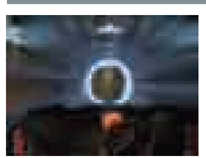
VERDICT 8/10

THE BEST FPS WE'VE PLAYED IN A LONG WHILE

24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

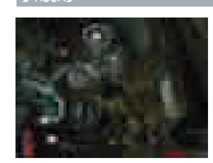
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

10 MINS



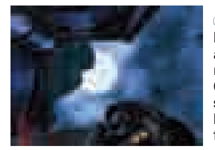
After a fair amount of talking in the beginning, *Prey's* action finally kicks off. After a quick bar brawl we're transported to the spaceship.

3 HOURS



The first 'big boss' is out of the way. Thanks to our inability to die, we finished him off easily. Thank the Lord above for invulnerability.

3 DAYS



Normal mode has been easily accomplished and it's now time to take on Cherokee mode. You still can't really die, but you 'sort of die' far more often.

DOOM 3

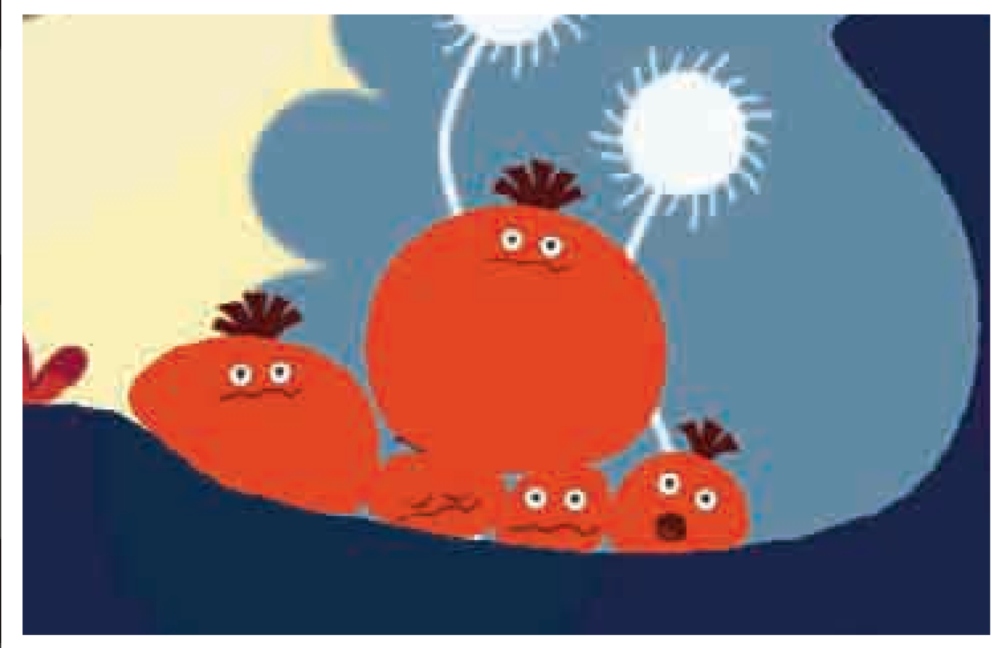


BETTER THAN

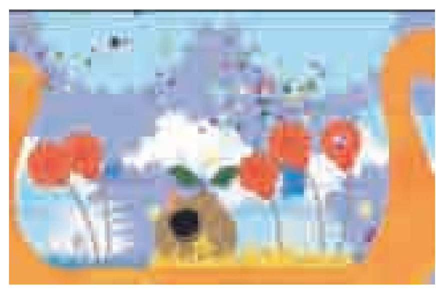
WORSE THAN

HALF-LIFE 2





There are several different LocoRocos to play as, each with their own personality.



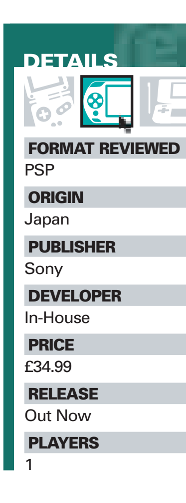
Effortlessly attractive and infinitely playable, *LocoRoco* may just be the best thing to come out of PSP.



The various levels include snow-covered vistas as well as sweet summertime environments.

LOCOROCO

SONY'S PSP SAVED BY JELLY?



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Now that the initial brouhaha has waned, people have started to look very differently at the PSP. The immediate impact of its sleek design and impressive power has been slowly eroded by underwhelming releases, the collapsing UMD market, and a cacophony of dissenting voices regarding the button layout. Nintendo's DS, on the other hand, is going from strength to strength – a phenomenon in Japan and catching on quickly in both Europe and the US.

There are, of course, a number of reasons for the turnaround, but chief among them is the fact that Nintendo has embraced the DS for what it is: a handheld. Sony has struggled to provide PlayStation2 power on a portable format, forgetting that the majority of current-gen games are just too complex to make a perfect transition. Nintendo has embraced simplicity, releasing a string of titles combining ease of play with an experience entirely different to that of a home console. The release of *LocoRoco*, then, should be seen as a great day for PSP owners; it is a game packed with the sort of unbridled verve and imagination for which Nintendo is famous. Indeed, *LocoRoco* is so accomplished that it could well give Miyamoto and friends a case of the green-eyed monster.

You take control of a LocoRoco, a gelatinous blob with a penchant for singing. Movement is controlled by the shoulder buttons which allow you to tilt the level 30 degrees in either direction, forcing your Roco to slide and roll accordingly. As you merrily make your way around the game's technicolour universe you must find fruit and flowers to eat, with every flower adding another Roco to your mass. Tapping the circle button breaks you up into individual Rocos, while holding the button down will simulate an earthquake, making the Rocos reform in terror.

The gameplay is simplicity itself – the limited buttons cleverly side-stepping the PSP's problematic layout – and leaves you free to revel in the wonderfully surreal game design. Each level is a barrage of pinks, yellows, reds and greens, as well as smiling stars, flowers and suns. Wind currents pick you up and send you spinning through the air, and a huge skeletal arm swoops from nowhere and sticks you to a glue-covered ceiling. Fresh surprises await you at every turn, and it's all too tempting just to let yourself be swept along with the sheer beautiful ridiculousness of it all.

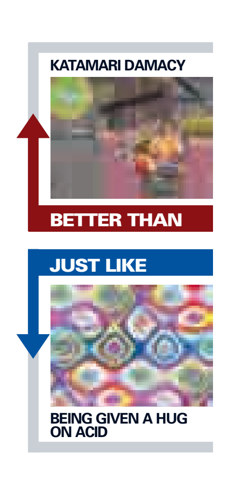
The score complements this sweet-natured vibe perfectly. Every song is a frustratingly catchy mini-masterpiece – some joyous, some serene. Videogame music generally walks the line between okay and terrible, colourlessly blending into the background. LocoRoco, however, is a rare example of music lifting a game to new heights, but it's only once the nascent visual and aural kick has dissipated that

FAQs

Q. SO WHAT'S THE STORY?
A. The world of the LocoRoco is under attack from the evil Moja Corps.

Q. HOW CAN THEY BE STOPPED?
A. By eating fruit and flowers to create more LocoRocos.

Q. EH?
A. Just listen to the happy music and go with it. Trust us.



Once separated, the individual LocoRocos can work as a team.

Each level is filled with gloriously surreal imagery.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

TILT: You don't move the LocoRocos, you just manipulate their surroundings.

DANGER: With very few ways to actually die, the emphasis is on getting the best out of each level.

the real marvel of the game can emerge. A game this beautiful could survive on looks alone, but with very few ways to die a huge emphasis has been placed on intricate level design. As well as increasing the size of your Roco, you can score extra points by collecting pink flies, finding little people called Miu Miu, and acquiring items to add to your house. Fulfilling these sub-objectives is tricky as they are generally hidden away in secret areas that, for the first few levels in particular, can be extremely difficult to spot.

Discovering every secret virtually requires repeat play, but as you make progress the game's demented logic begins to make sense and the outlandish tasks you need to perform become second nature. In one instance our LocoRoco ground to a halt before a huge, pink obelisk with a sour face. At first it appeared there was no way past, but after reaching the correct mass – usually 10 or 15 Rocos – our Roco automatically separated down and sang till the obstruction was cheerful enough to let us through. On another occasion, we encountered a barrier in front of several square holes. Seeing no obvious solution we carried on until we found an owl that ate up and spat out our Roco in the shape of a square. Returning to the barrier, we were able to fill the holes, open the barrier and free the Miu Miu.

The experience of playing *LocoRoco* is not something that can be explained easily in words. It suffices to say that this is a title quite unlike anything else we've played – kindred in spirit to the *Katamari* games, but there the similarity ends. Such an idiosyncratic approach is not going to be to everyone's taste; for every person who delights in the craziness there will be one who laments it, for every person who rejoices in the music there will be another who it drives crazy. Sometimes the regrettable price of originality is to ostracise the few; for everyone else there is a new game to love, a game to impress upon other people – people for which videogames have always seemed a dense and complicated mystery.

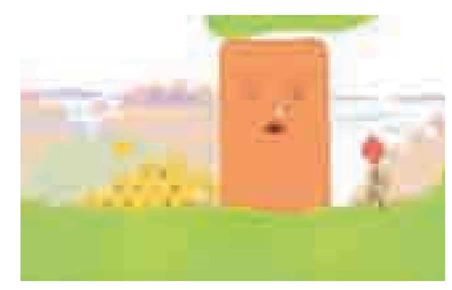
The best thing on PSP by some way, *LocoRoco* is pure fun on a little silver disc. Destined for cult status – buy it now, before everyone else tells you to.

VERDICT 9/10

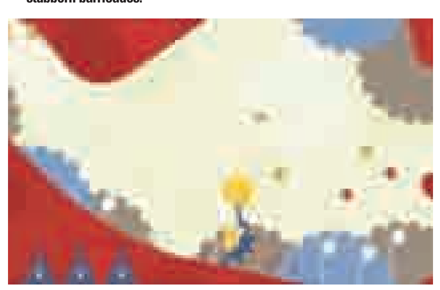
SIMPLY JOYOUS. THE BEST REASON TO OWN A PSP

THIS IS THE HOUSE THAT LOCO BUILT

The game is well designed enough to reward repeat play, but should you fancy something different there is still more fun to be had. You can design and build a house for your LocoRocos to live in using items awarded to you in the main game. There are dozens of platforms, wind currents, wheels and kickers for you to play with; the challenge being to create a fluid path for your gelatinous friends to whizz around in. With a selection of mini-games to get involved with, *LocoRoco* has depth and variety far beyond what you might expect.



Use the beautiful vocal prowess of the LocoRoco to win favour with stubborn barricades.



The soundtrack to *LocoRoco* is as gorgeous to listen to as the bizarre scenery is to watch.

CHROMEHOUNDS

RELEASE THE HOUNDS! DAMN, THEY'RE SLOW…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
From Software

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-12 Online)

Slow. If there's one word to define your *Chromehounds* experience, that word is slow. Everything in *Chromehounds* chugs along at its own pace and will not be hurried or rushed for anyone or anything. Everything in *Chromehounds* takes time to learn and the pick-up-and-play factor is borderline nil. Everything in *Chromehounds* is a drawn out affair where urgency and speed make way for tactics and planning. In short, everything in *Chromehounds* is slow.

Of course, slow isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's almost to be expected in a game where the main star is a hulking metallic beast. The arduous, lumbering nature of your mech is something From Software has captured beautifully, and it lets you feel in charge of a war machine rather than a scrap metal cast-off. Bar some slightly wonky moments with the physics, everything in your world is a target. Not just for your weapons, but for stomping underfoot too. Charging into battle in control of such a behemoth is something few other games can offer and From Software has quite rightly amplified the feeling of being able to rain down destruction on anything you see fit.

The sedate nature of *Chromehounds* also means this has a focus that other mech games lack, as you're afforded time to formulate plans, rethink strategies and change tack in the middle of battle. The game isn't hurried and neither are you, while this does lead to a strange lack of urgency, it's not entirely missed. Your mech has a variety of weapons with various advantages, broadly identifiable as stalwarts from the FPS genre – sniper rifle, grenade launcher, weak machine gun and so on. Fortunately, *Chromehounds* offers a bigger emphasis on mixing and matching your weapons; you should make the best use of your arsenal to proceed. As you capture radio towers and move through the maps, you also gain the ability to give orders to fellow mech units on the map. Once you start ordering other mechs into attacking positions while quickly scrolling through your own weapons to keep enemies at bay, you might even be thankful for the extra time afforded to you by its slow nature, especially as the controls for doing so aren't intuitive enough to survive in a fast-paced game.

And yet… the over-riding feeling isn't that you're appreciative of the focus gameplay or the sedate pace that allows you to formulate plans. Rather, you feel as though you're always trying to push the game on with your bare hands, frustrated and handicapped by its slow-burning pace. Why offer you a hulking war machine when there's so little action to indulge in? Why offer huge maps if

FAQs

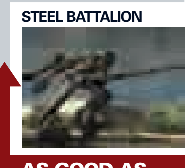
Q. SLOW GOING?
Yes. Mech-heads might not notice, but for those wanting to dip their toes into the genre to pass the barren 360 schedule, this game takes its time.

Q. WORTH IT FOR THE ACHIEVEMENTS?
It's not a use-and-lose game. There are different storylines to get through so nabbing all 1,000 gamerpoints takes ages.

Q. STORYLINE?
Usual post-apocalyptic, weapons-of-the-future, the-homeless-have-been-made-mech-pilots spiel.

Q. THE HOMELESS?
Sigh.

STEEL BATTALION



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



RING OF RED



The details on the mechs are to be savoured, though the environments themselves are bland, lifeless and uninspiring.



The excruciatingly slow pace of *Chromehounds* detracts from the fact that this is a pretty decent tactical affair.



It's a shame the mech garage feature is underplayed in single-player, as this could have provided more tactical punch.

Bullets! Flying in the air! That's the sort of thing that will make you shout "attention to detail"… if you like shouting things to yourself.

games™ GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

RELEASE THE HOUNDS: There are the usual Deathmatch modes to engage in with ranked and unranked matches, plus lobbies for post-match taunting. Beyond that? Release day will reveal all.

there's so little to fill them? The slow pace might have worked better in tighter environments or with more action to fill the huge, gaping chasms between missions, but *Chromehounds* doesn't offer either. The game suffers not through its own design or slow pace, but rather its unwillingness to entertain the player during the lulls.

At the heart of the problem is the brief nature of the action itself when it does arrive, as though the mechs you battle are merely checkpoints that fight back. In *Chromehounds*, you find yourself travelling for far too long to find a fight that's over far too quickly. It's simply too staccato to truly engage. The game splits its story across different pilot classes with Sniper, Fighter, Defender and Soldier just a few examples of what's on offer. Yet, regardless of who you choose, the same problem exists across all of them and you still find yourself plodding along on your own, urging the game to throw more action your way. Inevitably and unsurprisingly, the action does start to hit with a little more frequency and impact on the later levels, but only the most dedicated (or bored) will ever make it that far. Even so, this game takes far, far too long to warm up.

That *Chromehounds* gives you absolutely no eye candy to drool over, besides the shininess of the mechs, and tasty explosions, is another major problem. The world here is barren and bare with nothing to lust over visually and keep you otherwise occupied while travelling from point A to point B. It's just you and your own frustrating, agonising mission to reach the next objective point. Perhaps that's the point, *Chromehounds* is a little too lifeless for its own good. The final nail in the coffin to ensure this turns away those who don't belong to the mech-head crowd is the game's maddening inaccessibility. Learning how to customise and tailor your mech for upcoming missions is a vital part of the game, yet one that's been made unreasonably difficult to use thanks to clumsy meanings and a lack of useful tutorials. Even using the map isn't quite as straightforward as it should be. Nothing is.

It feels churlish to criticise a mech game for something that has become the genre's trademark – huge war machines coupled with slow pace – yet most mech games employ various tactics to disguise those shortcomings, whether through novelty controllers or eccentric design. *Chromehounds* offers neither. There's an argument that it's the kind of game that will work best on Live when there are real human mech-pilots alongside you, injecting life into the game with their own chatter and personality. It sounds a plausible theory and it's likely that just as *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* saw its class system come alive online, the same will ring true here.

Even if Xbox Live does prove *Chromehounds'* saviour, there's no denying that the single-player mode will be relegated to little more than a tactical playground to warm up for the online battle because it's just a little too one-note, a little too slow, a little too lifeless to truly engage. This lonely trek could certainly do with some human company.

VERDICT 5/10

NICE TACTICAL WORKOUT, BUT ULTIMATELY TOO SLOW

LIVE IT UP

Chromehounds **seems engineered for online play, and early reports show that it has extra layers of strategy not apparent in single-player. With the emphasis on mech-versus-mech rather than mech-versus-cannon fodder, gameplay becomes more defensive, and the human tension easily compensates for the slow pace. There's also more need to tinker in Garage mode, to tweak and build custom mechs for the long haul. Chaining weapons becomes important, too, and you'll find players finding their own roles rather than slotting into pre-determined ones.**



The explosions are nice, but then again, 'explosions are nice' isn't the reason you punched a hole in your bank balance for an Xbox 360.



Teaming up with other mechs does make the game slightly more interesting, but it still severely lacks thrills.

NINTENDO'S DS HAS BECOME THE BIG PUZZLE SYSTEM

TOUCH PANIC



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Aki Corp.

PRICE
¥3,800

RELEASE
Japan: Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

You can have a lot of fun with pieces of wood. (Yes you can.) Do you remember wooden toy train sets – those lovely pieces of pine track? Well, in *Touch Panic*, the latest DS puzzle gem from Japan, you have a big set of single-line track pieces, of the pinewood tile variety, and a board about which you can slide and rotate those tracks to make connections.

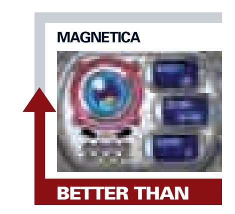
Touch Panic then rolls out some balls onto this game board, and one special pink piece of track which serves as a goal, leaving you with a theoretically simple task: just guide the balls to that goal. It's a bit more complicated than that, though, you have only five Panic Balls (the pink ones), which act as guiding magnets, and you're expected to chain the other balls together in combinations listed in the game as 'tricks' – there are four colours of ball, each represented by a playing card suit – for high scores and stage clears.

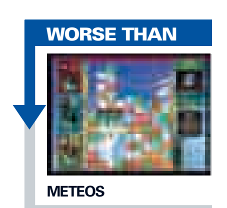
In practice, because the balls enter play gradually from the four corners of the board – and you have just one Panic Ball at any given time – it's difficult to clear stages without wasting some of your pink balls. And if you waste them all, it's Game Over. Later stages introduce Ojama Balls, too, nasty purple things to avoid running into, and whose introduction turns an already hectic challenge into something verging on the chaotic. From the very first stage, even in Easy mode, *Touch Panic* is fiendishly difficult.

As with *Meteos* and *Zoo Keeper*, *Touch Panic* is a great match for stylus control. It's easy to drag tiles vertically and horizontally, and rotation of tiles – performed by circling the stylus over any two-by-two square of four tiles – is generally a smooth operation. Unlike *Meteos*, however, there's nothing to be gained from haphazard stylus strokes here. There's no cop-out option; you have to think laterally and quickly – especially in Challenge mode where you have limited time and strokes with which to guide a Panic Ball from one corner of the screen to another.

Two-player mode (via Wi-Fi or locally through download play with only one game card) assigns one player as controller of the Panic Ball and the other as a master of Ojama balls. The Ojama player has a job roughly equivalent to control of the ghosts in *Pac-Man*. It works well, although Player One will inevitably end up a nervous, foul-mouthed wreck. A true 'Panic Ball'. But before you get to that stage, as in *Touch Panic*'s Single-player modes, you'll have had a big, fat helping of fun.

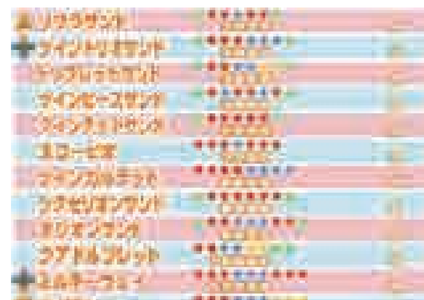




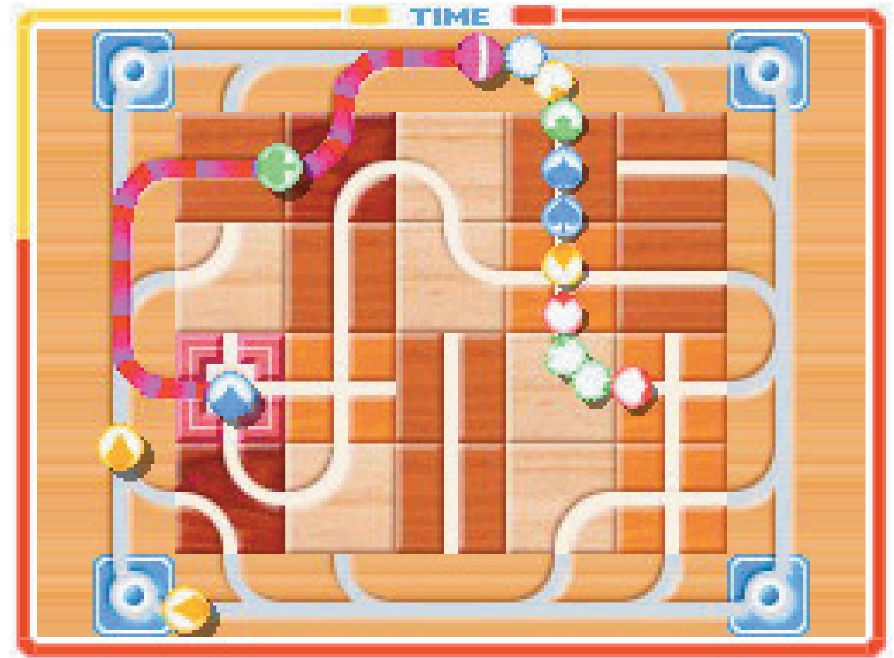




The Ojama balls are out and about, looking to end your happy rolling with their evil red eyes. Scary stuff.



There are 50 combos (tricks) listed. The most complex chains are rewarded with huge point totals.



This sort of chain takes some skill to form. Tap the Panic Ball and the whole chain rushes toward the pink goal.

ROGER FEDERER IS A CHEAT CHARACTER. IN REAL LIFE

VIRTUA TENNIS 3



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation3, Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£1 credit

RELEASE
Arcade: Out Now
PS3/360: Q1 '07

PLAYERS
1-2

Quite how it has taken Sega five years to produce the third in its highly popular series of tennis games is somewhat baffling. To all but the trained eye, *Virtua Tennis 3* is identical to its predecessor. There may have been a few additional layers of detail to player models, a few new shot animations and a touch of HDR lighting, but playing through a couple of sets is no different to how it was back in 2001.

This makes *Virtua Tennis 3* tough to review. *Virtua Tennis 2* was a superb game in its own right – improving on the original in key areas while retaining its immediacy and charm – and *Virtua Tennis 3* is another step in the right direction. However, what was glorious in 2001 is no longer quite so breathtaking. 2K Sports' *Top Spin 2* has ushered in a much deeper, tactical game of tennis that oozes playability and offers numerous shot types, positional possibilities and styles of play. *Virtua Tennis 3* simply has players that dive around far too much.

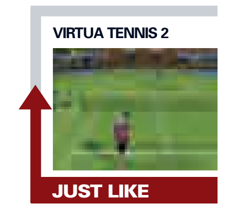
It's admirable that Sega has seen fit to maintain an 'arcadey' naivety for *Virtua Tennis 3*, but in doing so it's apparent that the competition has already passed it by. Rallies are still exciting, cross-court winners are still thrilling and a cultured drop shot will still earn begrudging respect from your opponent, but there's very little else to discuss – it's become too simple for its own good. Besides, all of the above was possible in *Virtua Tennis 2*. And the original, for that matter.

While *Top Spin 2* has improved virtual tennis (perhaps more than we had realised at the time), *Virtua Tennis 3* brings with it a plethora of niggling problems that have plagued the game since its inception. The aforementioned diving borders on the ridiculous; it would be far more gratifying to have a Rafael Nadal-esque 'skidding-cross-court' animation or simply a desperate stretch rather than all the Becker-style lunges. Also, the game's AI still has problems locating the ball, and even if you're in the correct position it will often swing and miss – thoroughly frustrating.

Even with its limitations and irksome issues, *Virtua Tennis 3* is still a supremely diverting game and a worthy waste of a few pounds in the local arcade, especially in the frantically fast Doubles mode. Whether the forthcoming PS3 version can add enough meat to truly compete against *Top Spin 2*, on the other hand, looks less and less likely with every misjudged smash or position-spoiling dive. A definite disappointment.

VERDICT 6/10
A SERIES STUCK IN THE PAST

VIRTUA TENNIS 2

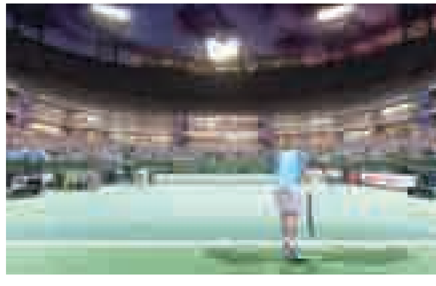


JUST LIKE

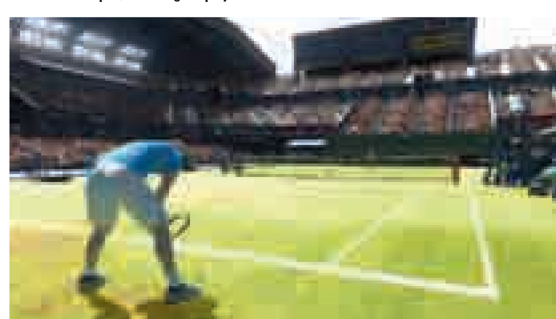
WORSE THAN



TOP SPIN 2



Stadiums and character models have been significantly improved upon, but alas gameplay has not.



Each player's style of play is captured perfectly – Federer's trademark backhand is as deadly as it is in real life.



Clay courts certainly make for a slower, more thoughtful game of tennis.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

A MOUSE, A MOUSE, MY KINGDOM FOR A MOUSE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Electronic Arts Los Angeles

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
14 July

PLAYERS
1-4

It's nearly three years since the last blockbuster based on Tolkien's seminal trilogy was screened in cinemas, and yet Electronic Arts is refusing to let the lucrative licence die. *The Battle For Middle-Earth II* already proved itself in the PC market when it was released back in March, and now it hopes to achieve the same success on Xbox 360. The ability to view armies of elves, dwarves and orcs on a high-definition television, without having to hunch over a tiny monitor should be the stuff that dreams are made of, right? We'd certainly like to think so…

The main problem with *The Battle For Middle-Earth II* is that – despite an obvious amount of work on behalf of Electronic Arts Los Angeles – it's just not suited to a home console, even one with the grunt that the 360 can muster. There's no denying that EA's sequel is a great game that successfully builds upon everything that made the PC original so enjoyable, but a joypad, no matter how well designed, is no match for the humble mouse.



It's a fact made painfully clear as you make your way deeper into the game, and believe us, thanks to the well-designed maps, solid storyline and decent acting – Sir Ian McKellan, Christopher Lee and Hugo Weaving all reprise their film roles – this will happen a lot sooner than you would have thought. EALA has listened to its audience and delivered a follow-up that manages to improve on its successor in every way. The most obvious difference is that there are three new factions to play as – Elves, Goblins and Dwarves – bringing the grand total to six. Each new race brings with it a specific set of skills – the fast-breeding goblins have pathetic defence but overwhelming numbers, while the sheer attacking power of the dwarves is countered by their painfully slow pace. The Elves on the other hand are poor at hand-to-hand combat yet boast superior missile skills and have speedy units. Each class is extremely well balanced and, when added to the existing Mordor, Isengard and Men of the West, gives plenty of scope for the game's many skirmishes.

The Battle For Middle-Earth II once again sees you play either a good or evil campaign, and despite using the same locations, each side's objectives couldn't be more different. Fight on the side of good and you'll find yourself

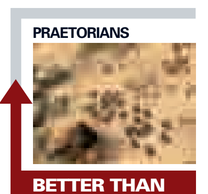
FAQs

Q. JUST LIKE THE PC GAME?
Nearly. It's just missing the build-your-own-hero generator and the spiffy War Of The Ring mode.

Q. GOOD SUMMON POWERS?
Definitely. Some of the creatures you can summon are very impressive.

Q. FAITHFUL TO THE FILMS?
Sadly not. All the action takes place up in the North, although characters such as Gandalf and Elrond do make appearances.

PRAETORIANS

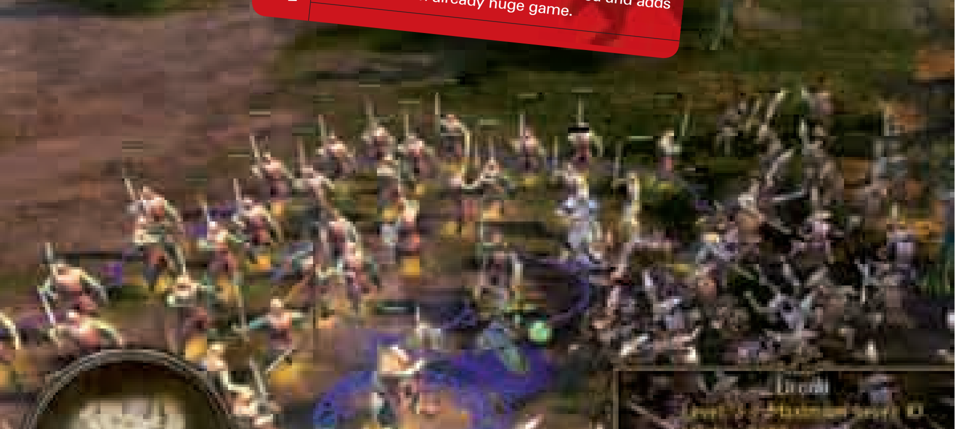


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II (PC)



Elrond is just one of the heroes from the novels that you'll have direct control of.



Will we ever see an end to Electronic Arts' familiar franchise? Not at this rate, eh?



As usual, the voices of the original actors add substantial weight to the *Lord Of The Rings* videogames.

frantically trying to defend your small armies against seemingly limitless hordes of enemies as you strategically work out the best way to defeat your opponents. Play on the side of evil and you can run riot thanks to your superior numbers and brute force.

It's not just the factions and campaigns that have been improved; EALA has made plenty of other adjustments, most notably you can build your bases however and wherever you want. It's a marked improvement over the set structure of the original game and gives you far greater freedom. When you have the relevant buildings in place, they will continually collect funds, although you're somewhat limited in that you can't place buildings too close to each other. As a result, you're forced to expand your army to staggering proportions, and that's when the problems start to creep in.

As your forces build up, you find yourself constantly wanting to zoom out and survey your impressive troops. Unfortunately, while it's possible to dive straight into the action and marvel at the highly detailed and beautifully animated combatants you can only pull back so far, and thus have to rely on the supplied map for most of your planning. The other problems with the game come down to the hardware itself.

Despite rebuilding the PC interface – many commands can be pulled up by simply holding the L or R triggers and then selecting them with the D-Pad – a joypad can't cope with the sort of deft manipulation that's required to get the most out of your army, especially when you're dealing with multiple units. Then there are the bizarre pauses that sometimes appear as the screen starts to fill up with enemies – the controls tend to become sluggish and occasionally fail entirely – very annoying, especially when frantically trying to manage a hundred tasks at once. Throw in some of the lengthiest loading times since *Oblivion* and the Xbox's first RTS feels somewhat rushed. This in itself is a real shame as the game looks and sounds glorious. From the dark, murky depths of Fanghorn Forest to the rolling hills of The Shire, no attention to detail has been spared and you'll almost pity the many locations you have to destroy in the name of war. The music is also of a high standard, and the rousing, recognisable tunes and authentic battle sounds elevate *The Battle For Middle-Earth II*'s atmosphere considerably.

This may be a highly polished game that greatly improves on its predecessor, but with the PC version being a good £20 pounds cheaper and much easier to play, this 360 version is already beginning to look a little tired. Make no mistake, *The Battle For Middle-Earth II* is probably the best console RTS that we've ever played in terms of flexibility and control, but it will still prove frustratingly slow and awkward to seasoned PC and Mac users. Everyone else, however, should find their stay in Middle-earth very pleasant indeed.

VERDICT 7/10

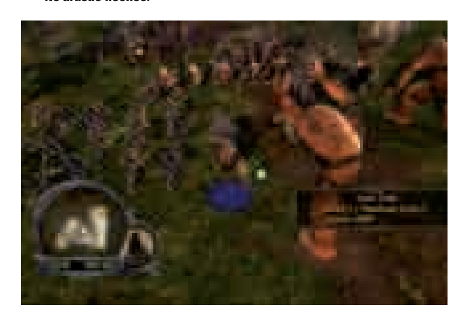
ENJOYABLE GAME LET DOWN BY HARDWARE ISSUES

ALMOST PERFECT

Considering *The Battle For Middle-Earth II* is little more than a direct port of its elder PC brother, it's a little disappointing that one of the most enjoyable sections of the game hasn't been included. Sadly, the Xbox port doesn't feature the rather excellent War Of The Ring mode, a solid take on *Risk* that could be played by a variety of different players, and greatly expands the game's admittedly already lengthy playing time. Still, Skirmish mode more than makes up for it.

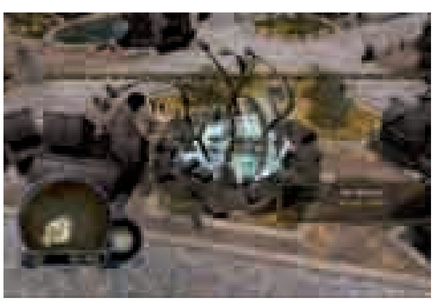


All right, so an army of men wouldn't kill a Nazgul – it's artistic licence.





Sure, you can see your army, but what if you actually want to view your opponents?



Amass enough points and you can summon up some very deadly allies.

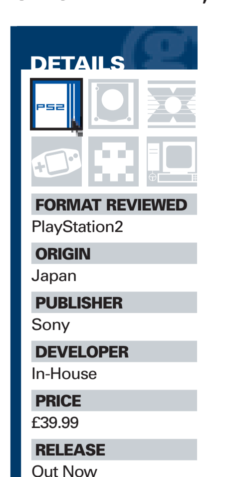


The random pauses when there are many enemies on screen can be very irritating.

FORBIDDEN SIREN 2

ONCE 'BIDDEN, TWICE SHY?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Perhaps the one thing scarier than the terrifying atmosphere and relentless enemies in Keiichiro Toyama's *Forbidden Siren* was the difficulty level. Pitched very high from the outset, while it helped increase the fear factor, it also stopped many from experiencing the game fully – even regular gamers switched off in frustration after the first few areas. A shame, as *Siren* had a lot to offer the survival-horror genre. With its intriguing plot and the innovative 'sightjacking' feature – where you could see through the eyes of your enemies – it was a great concept unfortunately not matched by the slightly clunky execution. The ear-assaultingly bad voice acting and over-complicated controls didn't help matters.

Siren 2 immediately sets out to rectify this by providing the player with an easy difficulty level, a useful hint system, and more streamlined game mechanics. Where before you'd have to open a menu to perform certain actions, the context-sensitive X button allows for quicker, simpler movements – a real boon when chased by the dangerous zombie Shibito. There's an improved first-person view, which is more practical than before – and more realistically immersive – allowing you to marvel at the impressive locations apparently based on real places. The frustration at the repetitive stealth-based gameplay has dissipated too, with far more varied missions in the 15-hour plus adventure. While objectives are ostensibly similar – in that the majority require you to find a particular item, escort someone, or simply make it to the exit – the disparate characters have diverse abilities, which allows for completely different approaches to the stages. To further enhance the accessibility, the levels are fairly short, each with several checkpoints, meaning untimely deaths don't send you back too far.

The story – one of the strongest features of the original – is even better here. With the single event of a massive blood-red tidal wave capsizing a ferry onto Yamijima Island tying everything together, the rather episodic structure doesn't matter thanks to some cleverly intertwined plot threads. Levels are revisited with different characters and subtle differences each time. Performing certain actions in one chapter can allow progress in another. Picking up random items dotted about adds background to the main plot. It all sounds very complicated, but is handled very well – the spreadsheet-like 'Link Navigator' shows the connected sections clearly, while the Archive can be accessed at any point to read up on discovered items, giving hints and interesting character information.

You'll grow rather attached to these characters, too, as they're pursued across Yamijima by enemies just as intelligent and fierce as in the

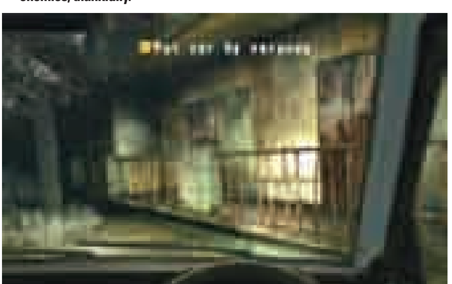
FAQs

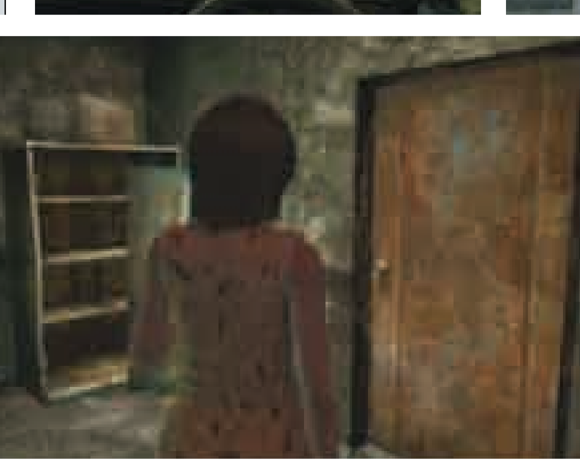
Q. STILL BIZARRE?
Yes. The twisting plot is suitably mental – not many games have a dog with a giant human head as a recurring enemy.

Q. STILL SCARY?
Not quite as unnervingly creepy as the original, but the sightjack alerts are still effective jump-shocks.

Q. STILL COCKNEY?
No. A much-improved English dub or the Japanese audio with subtitles. No 'apples-and-pears' school kids here.

Would YOU want to stay at this hotel? The car can be used to run over your enemies, thankfully.



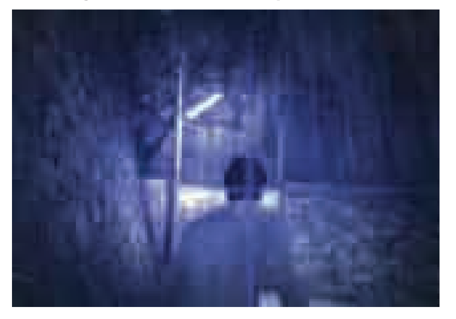




Somehow *Siren 2*'s clever weaving storyline is even better than the one that went before it.

JACK POWER…

The sightjacking feature that was the original *Siren's* USP has been reinvigorated here. Several characters can utilise the power in totally unique ways, both for puzzle-solving and avoiding confrontation, for example, partially sighted Shu Mikami can move while 'jacking, using the eyes of his guide dog to move around the Shibito, while certain areas trigger psychic Akiko's power to see sepia-toned memories. Part-time worker Ikuko has perhaps the most interesting ability – she can actually control the movement of the Shibito for a short time. It's great fun using one zombie to shoot another and collecting the downed foe's weapon to use in battle.



ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

VARIETY SHOW: *Siren 2's* stealth levels, run-and-gun missions and sniping sequences mix it up well.

MULTIPLE PLOTS: The story rivals *Silent Hill 2* for depth and complexity, moving back and forth through time with confidence and skill.



Schoolgirls with automatic weapons, but this ain't no Battle Royale.

first game. Initially, you're faced with the zombie-like Shibito from the original, but later come the Yamibito – or 'people of the dark' – who are affected by the light. So you're torn between using your torch to illuminate your path and help kill the Yamibito, and switching it off and hiding from the Shibito. It's a risk/reward mechanic that's pretty successful, and provides moments of genuine fear. And that's before you factor in the larval Yamirei and spirit-like Shiryo, who can resurrect destroyed enemies…

The main area in which *Siren 2* falls down, however, is when it conforms to genre. While the controls have been improved, there's still the occasional annoyance. The way your character can go from a run to a slow walk when stepping near a corpse can heighten tension, but when an Uzi-toting adversary is chasing you, it's no joke. Then there's the odd moment of unintentional hilarity – the carefully maintained atmosphere is occasionally shattered by some 'direlogue' or a comical facial expression during the grainy cut-scenes. The story structure has its flaws too – while it's meant to be disorientating, it's occasionally too oblique for words, with certain events coming out of nowhere, and character revelations not making any sense at all. One or two of the puzzles are almost willfully obscure, while the difficulty definitely spikes during sections where you're completely unarmed.

Despite this, *Silent Hill* creator Toyama and his team deserve praise for listening to criticism of the original and improving it in almost every way. While *Forbidden Siren 2* can't recreate the freshness and impact that its predecessor had, it's bigger, more complicated, more accessible, and overall more enjoyable. And, perhaps most importantly, it's still scary – the determined, unrelenting, almost *Terminator*-esque enemies really will not stop, ever, until you are dead. Sweet dreams.



VERDICT 7/10

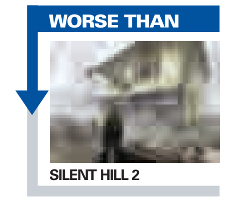
THIS SIREN'S CALL IS HARD TO RESIST

FORBIDDEN SIREN

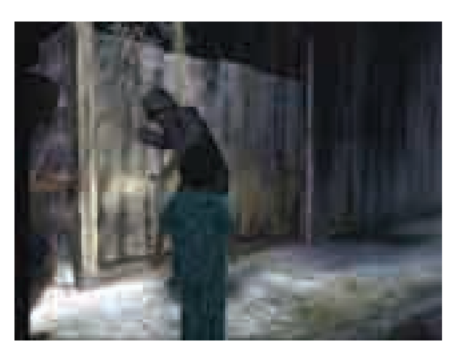


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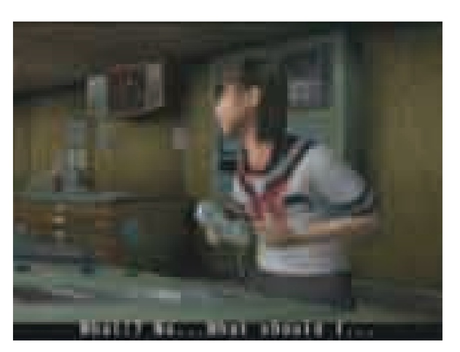
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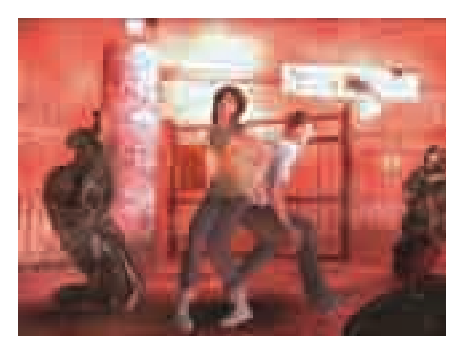
SILENT HILL 2



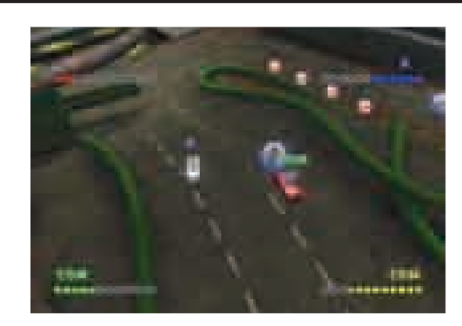
The chavs were targeting even kids for their happy-slapping kicks.



Thank the Lord, the children aren't cockney any more.



A rare explosion of colour to illuminate the gloom.







■ The lack of boats, helicopters and other vehicles is a shame, but it still doesn't detract from the fun.



■ There's nothing worse than seeing the CPU outwit and outdrive you. Jipped! – to use the parlance of our times.

MICRO MACHINES V4

A MINI ADVENTURE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
PSP, PC, DS

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Codemasters

DEVELOPER
Supersonic Software

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

The discovery that *Mashed* and *Micro Machines V4* share the same development team is far from surprising. Save for a licence, the scale of the vehicles and the lack of post-death attack mechanism, *Micro Machines V4* plays almost identically to the game that owes its entire existence to *Micro Machines* in the first place.

This is no bad thing however, as *Mashed* is a tremendously fun multi-player racer, and in turn so is *Micro Machines V4*. With a phenomenal 750 vehicles available to collect, some 50 tracks and the series' familiar sense of irreverence and mischief, many hours can happily be wasted scooting around the household environments with reckless abandon. As long as you are with company, that is.

Micro Machines V4's Single-Player mode is wildly misjudged. While our review code arrived with a warning that the "AI difficulty is still undergoing some balancing… currently very difficult", the fact that even the easiest setting saw opponents racing the perfect line each race made life as a sole Micro Machiner a sad place to be. The balance may be restored before release, but that won't stop the Single-Player mode from feeling like a vacuous waste of time. While it maintains the delightful handling and imaginative tracks of the multi-player, it seems almost redundant without the element of human competition.

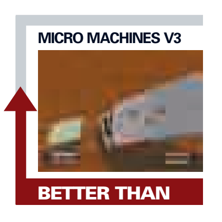
Micro Machines has never been about solitary play, though, and it's a pleasure to announce that *V4* finds the series back on form and as entertaining as the good old Mega Drive days. With four players, the tension, frustration, elation and intense competition of a lengthy multi-player session is as thrilling as ever. Cars handle superbly; every turn rides the line between perfection and absolute loss of control with seemingly little effort, and it only takes a moment's lack of concentration to spoil an otherwise faultless run. The "push opponents off the screen" dynamic returns, and while seeming initially unfair (one can lose while still clearly in view), the distance for victory remains consistent throughout.

Credits earned in multi-player also allow tracks to be unlocked, so no time has to be spent in the soulless single-player – a wise move. In fact, *Micro Machines V4*'s only genuine problem is its overbearing similarity to *Mashed*, a game that can be bought for a third of the price. Should you have exhausted that game's frantic charms though, then look no further than *V4*. It's good to have the little chaps back.



VERDICT 7/10
A FINE RETURN TO FORM

MICRO MACHINES V3



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



MASHED

FLATOUT? BURNOUT? IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?

FLATOUT 2

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MORE, MORE, MORE: With more destructible items, cars, tracks, mini-games, and upgrades, *FlatOut 2* is significantly larger in every sense. It's also better.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
Finland

PUBLISHER
Empire

DEVELOPER
Bugbear Entertainment

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
4 (2-8 Online)

Occasionally a game appears that so totally fulfils the expectations of its genre that it becomes difficult to see how anything could possibly be better. *Halo* did it for first-person shooters, the *Pro Evolution* series continues to do it for football, and for arcade racing it was *Burnout 3: Takedown*. Games of this quality are a trap for critics, as it becomes difficult to view new releases as anything other than pretenders to the throne.

FlatOut 2 is likely to fall victim to comparison with the *Burnout* games. It's impossible to deny that there are some obvious similarities, but to judge this game on the merits of the genre's pinnacle would be to deny a great-looking and unquestionably fun game the chance of a fair judgement. *Takedown* broke the mould, and every arcade racer since owes it a debt. But while not staggeringly original, *FlatOut 2* at least tries to offer a depth and variety of content not often seen.

You can race in three different classes – Derby, Race and Street – with each class boasting its own set of cars. This alone would provide hours of playing time, but *FlatOut 2* supplements the main game with a Destruction Derby mode and 11 ragdoll mini-games. Those familiar with *FlatOut* will know that these mini-games involve hurling your driver's body through the windshield and toward a sports-themed target – soccer goal, dartboard, baseball bat. How much of a bonus they offer depends on how well the sight of a lifeless body crashing against concrete sits in your stomach, but even so they provide a measure of variety beyond the call of duty.

Fans of the original – that's 700,000 and counting – will find much familiarity here. The fundaments of the game have stayed the same, though the scale of expansion is truly impressive. There are now 34 vehicles compared to the original's 16, with 60 track combinations over *FlatOut*'s 36. The destructive element has also been increased dramatically. Each vehicle has 40 hit points, and every track has 5,000 destructible items littering the surface – from gates and oil drums to aeroplanes and exploding fuel canisters.

To say that this creates an air of unpredictability is an understatement – chaos would be more accurate – and handled badly the slew of battered debris could have upset the balance between skill and aggression that the original maintained. *FlatOut 2* handles the extra workload admirably, avoiding slow-down and remembering the position of every item lap-to-lap, resulting in an invigorating shot of speed and carnage that tops that of the original, even if it does fall short of the mighty *Burnout*.



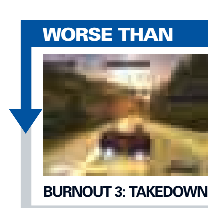
A WELCOME ADDITION TO ARCADE RACING

FLATOUT

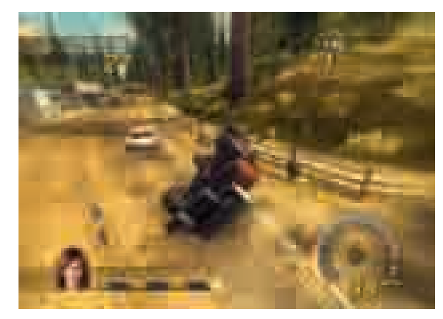


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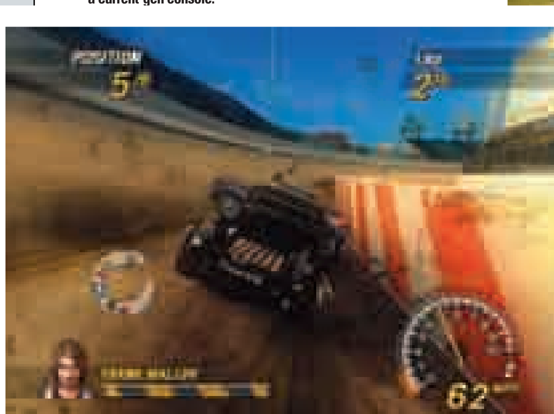
WORSE THAN



BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN



The game's damage effects are among the most sophisticated seen on a current-gen console.





The wide selection of tracks range from woodland to desert to the city streets.



Five, six, pick up sticks – except they're actually massive great trees and you can have one in each arm. Magic.



Flame-throwers are just the tip of the iceberg – you can also equip mech sniper rifles.



You can also make Vanilla run around in his swimming trunks and look like a bit of an idiot.

STEAMBOT CHRONICLES

ARE YOU READY TO JOIN A BUMPY TROT BAND?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Atlus

DEVELOPER
Irem

PRICE
$34.99

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

Atlus USA's strategy of finding obscure Japanese games to localise for the American market pays off less frequently than you might expect. Quite apart from the fact that such titles seldom appeal to the mass market, a game's quirkiness is not an indication of its quality. Certainly, concepts that we would consider 'unusual' are far more likely to get made into games in Japan than they are over here, however, there's still no guarantee that they will be made well. *Steambot Chronicles* is one of those games whose concept – it's essentially a rhythm-action mech game – is unusual and exciting enough to justify localisation, but its execution is affected by imperfections that inevitably ruin the experience for those without the patience or inclination to indulge its flaws. Players willing to suffer a little annoyance for the sake of the unusual, though, will find a sweet and inventive game with considerable scope and appeal here.

Known in Japan by the timeless title of '*Bumpy Trot*', *Steambot Chronicles* is set amid an alternative industrial revolution during which personal mech units were developed shortly after the motor car, and soon superseded them in usefulness. Its world is at once classical and futuristic, incorporating life and likeability into its grimy industrialised cities and rural suburbs with its breadth and variety of characters and activities.

Your character, Vanilla, is a fairly typical amnesiac Japanese RPG hero with no memory of his past, washed up on the shore and rescued by a girl who happens to be a member of a world-famous band. From there, it's surprisingly open-ended. Although the plot is always there to drive things forward, there is ample opportunity to dally, spending time pimping up your mech or busking on street corners to earn money, or playing billiards or fossil-hunting or indulging in any of the plentiful side-quests. There is no shortage of diversions, which means that *Steambot Chronicles* chunters along at a fairly leisurely pace. It's a relaxing game, reminiscent of a classical RPG whose irksome random battling and travelling have been removed leaving only the explorative town sections, side-quests and mini-games.

The story itself follows the band whose lead singer rescued Vanilla in the beginning – a band that the player can choose to join if so wished. Music plays a substantial part in the game; each of the multitude of instruments available – from guitar to piano to harmonica – has a different little control mechanic that loosely mimics playing the instrument in real life (usually extremely loosely). These range from the ridiculously easy trumpet to the practically impossible accordion, and, naturally, the better you play, the more money you'll get busking

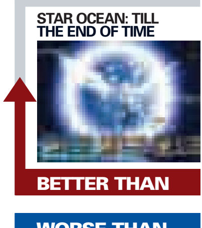
FAQs

Q. WHY NOT 'BUMPY TROT'?
We don't know. *'Bumpy Trot'* is a great name.

Q. HOW MANY MECH PARTS ARE THERE?
Loads. Some can be purchased, others can be developed by combining two other parts.

Q. DO YOU HAVE TO PLAY IN THE BAND?
You don't HAVE to do anything in this game, but playing in the band is a prominent section.

STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



FINAL FANTASY XII

The Garland Globetrotters. What a rubbish band.

Check out that trident. That's 30 hours worth of game, that trident.

and the more tips you'll get after concerts with the band. You accumulate different music to play along to throughout the game, but sadly the Garland Globetrotters' tunes are so very wet that it's not exactly fun to jam along. Largely, they're imperfectly translated nonsensical J-pop with very little to redeem them except their entertainingly stupid lyrics ("Where are my wings? You took them from me, Never to give them back to me"), and even the promise suggested by the invention of the electric guitar near the end of the game yields only one horribly out-of-tune, cheesy pop song.

It doesn't help that the sound quality of *Steambot Chronicles* is hardly exemplary; some of the instruments are painfully midi-fied and sound horribly tinny while busking. The playing-in-a-band component of the game is one of the things we found most attractive, but it would be so much more enjoyable if it just had some good tunes or at least decent sound quality. Similarly, the mech battling, which also forms a substantial portion of the game, would be hugely more enjoyable if the lock-on worked properly; only the merest bit of fine-tuning would have made this an awful lot more compelling to play. The slowdown in the town areas is also painful; whenever there are more than about three things on the screen, the game slows to a crawl, which makes it very difficult to enjoy in the latter stages especially. For all its charm and inventiveness, *Steambot Chronicles* is somewhat inadequate in terms of construction.

The game tries desperately hard to be impressive, and we think it really could have been if only a little more work had been put into polishing it up. Those who are likely to appreciate its relaxed pace and variety without getting too hung up on its shortcomings, though, are likely to enjoy it hugely nonetheless. Atlus has done well to localise this for the American market, as it's exactly the sort of thing that is almost never made in the West. Stubbornly quirky, unashamedly inventive, strangely relaxed and only a little bit broken, *Steambot Chronicles* is a game quite unlike anything else out there at the moment.

games™

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

STOMPY: For about a third of the time, *Steambot Chronicles* is a mech combat game…

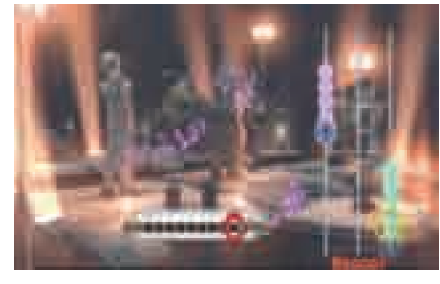
SANDBOX: …the rest of the time, it's a melange of rhythm action, adventure and varied RPG.

VERDICT 7/10

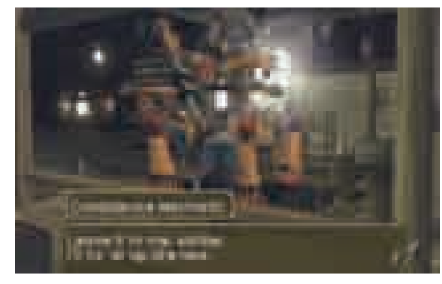
LEISURELY, UNUSUAL AND PLEASINGLY VARIED

REPUTATION IS ALL

Why, for heaven's sake, are Japanese protagonists always kids? Why is it that Vanilla can't just go and buy a beer in a bar at any point in the game, and yet he's still busy wooing two of his rather mature female band-mates at the same time? Madness. Anyway, your actions and the way you dress him dictate Vanilla's reputation throughout. With each new day, he gets a new nickname depending on how he acted the previous day – two of our favourites so far have been the Vagrant Charlatan and the Enraged Admirer, mostly because we have no idea what they mean. This is why it's worth putting up with *Steambot Chronicles* – there's so much lovely weirdness contained within.



Top tip: always play the trumpet wherever possible. It's so easy that you're guaranteed giant tips.



There's an obligatory choice-based 'big twist' in the middle of this, as with any sandbox – we won't spoil it for you.

GUILD WARS: FACTIONS

WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE ON?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
NCsoft

DEVELOPER
ArenaNet

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
Massively Multi-player

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 98/ME/2000/XP
Intel Pentium III 800 MHz or equivalent
256 MB RAM
32MB VRAM
2GB HDD Space
Internet Connection

Considering how concerning the thought of our own mortality is, we seem to be somewhat wasteful when it comes to making use of the precious hours with which we've been gifted. As the clock ticks ever onward and the sand falls to the bottom of the hourglass, we simply sit – sit and pour another hundred hours into *Guild Wars*. It is worth it. We'll collect a copious amount of Fur Squares and acquire top-tier armour. Our *Bone Horrors* will be L20.

The first time *Guild Wars* was presented to us, it was all consuming for a lengthy period of time. This was largely due to the fact that not only is it a quality MMO, but it's also completely free to play. No online fees mean far more happy players – simple as that. After all, you'd be surprised how many will give their time freely in exchange for fun when that experience costs nothing.

That's how it went. Over 200 hours gone. Now, for better or worse, NCsoft has released the first new campaign, *Guild Wars: Factions*. Far more than an expansion, *Factions* is a sort of standalone title that can act as an add-on to the core package if desired – much the same as the role *City Of Villains* played when it was released after *City Of Heroes*. When combined with the first *Guild Wars*, there are a number of benefits – which we will come to later – but on its own you're looking to spend roughly the same amount of time again on a whole batch of new content. The folk at ArenaNet have certainly been busy. Then again, so have we. The problem with MMO games is that it's near impossible to provide an accurate review until the servers are full, people are playing and things are up and running as they should. In short, a while after the game has become available to the public. Annoying, but where's the sense of reviewing an MMO without at least 50-100 hours behind the wheel?

The main difference is the introduction of two new classes, namely Assassin and Ritualist. Assassins are a balanced class, with reasonable damage mitigation, who can perform adequately in both magic and brawling instances and have a skillset that relies on linking moves and abilities in quick succession to confuse and damage foes. Ritualists play a support role and, with their key abilities revolving around healing and summoning, seem to be a mix of the existing Necromancer and Monk classes. It's probably worth noting that these are the only two classes that have their full range of skills available in the *Factions* game. Although the other six classes are available to choose as characters – and there are easily enough skills on offer to create a

FAQs

Q. SO THIS IS AN EXPANSION PACK?
A. Not at all, you don't need the original game to play.

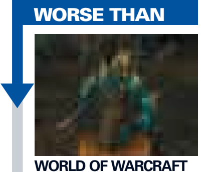
Q. A STANDALONE TITLE, RIGHT?
A. Well, yes, but there are a few advantages to owning the first *Guild Wars*.

Q. IS IT WORTH BUYING IF I DON'T OWN GUILD WARS?
A. Sure. There's still a mass of content to plough through.

AS GOOD AS
GUILD WARS



WORSE THAN
WORLD OF WARCRAFT

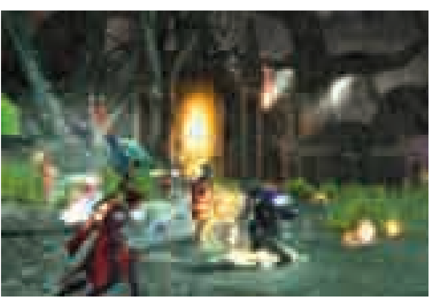


games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
NEW FACES: Two new classes bring even more variety to the table.
PEOPLE PERSON: Two new character slots become available for owners of the core game.

Although Warriors or 'tanks' are obviously the best when it comes to melee attacks, the new Assassin class comes a close second.



Dragons are famously annoying. This one is exceptionally good at killing you.



Communing Staff, Two-handed, 2-26 Dark Damage (9 Spawning Required), +9 Energy, +15 Health, +10 Armour = Punishment.

suitably capable avatar – the core *Guild Wars* pack is needed to visit Tyria and collect up some of the Elite skills available.

As far as the advantages of owning the core package go, that's really about it. Combining the two games will grant you an extra two character slots – bringing the total to six – but unless you're a rather hardcore boxer, there's little chance that you'll max out the four slots that come with the *Factions* pack, so as a standalone product this works very well.

Of course, a new map and a new story are necessary for a new campaign, and this is where the title becomes something a little grander than the original. The goings on in your new location – the oriental-looking land of Cantha – are a little more interesting than the story that played out in Tyria, and your involvement has far more impact on how the game progresses.

Aside from the rather nasty mutating plague that's spreading throughout the land – a story that's told at the very beginning of the game and provides a number of missions that see you hitting the level cap of 20 far faster than the original allowed – you have the warring factions that the game's title refers to, the Luxons and the Kurzic. You and your guild can opt to join either side and fight on their behalf; this will change the game depending on your alliance's success.

A line showing the current areas of control of each faction is a constant feature on the map, and ease of travel and accessibility of quests will vary depending on the current state of the map. For example, if your guild is aligned with the Luxons, and the guilds associated with the Kurzic push forward and take over a Luxon-controlled outpost, quests and key characters may no longer appear in that area. In order to gain access to these characters, missions must be completed for your faction so they can regain control. It's really not as complicated as it sounds, and not only works excellently but also promotes team play on a far greater level than the first title managed.

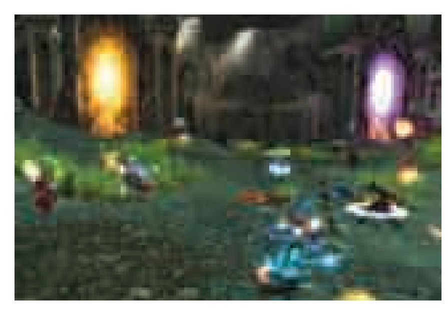
While some may argue that *Factions* is 'more of the same' and nothing greater than a hefty expansion, the sheer amount of fresh content easily makes the title a worthy purchase. Sure, you still run into the odd leech, the occasional player may disconnect mid-mission, and pulling is still the most effective means of combat, but the new elements, challenges and PvP areas that have now sprung up also add into the mix and ensure that *Guild Wars* maintains it's highly ranked position in the MMORPG genre. We look forward to the next instalment – we have been assured that it's not too far away.

VERDICT 8/10

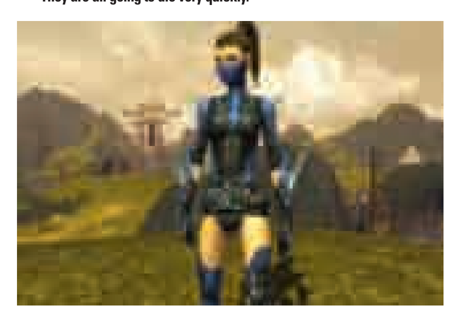
STILL ONE OF THE BEST MMORPGS ON OFFER

THE NEED FOR SPEED

Throughout the first *Guild Wars* package, you were presented with various co-op missions as you made your way across the land. Although a good way to boost XP and gain weaponry, victory was rarely essential to progress. In *Factions*, these missions are of higher importance, and entire areas become unavailable if you simply pass them by. Also, the 'bonus' objectives found in the first game have disappeared and the only way to get the full quota of XP available is to get your party through the mission as quickly as possible.



This is how not to do it. The leader should be calling targets. They are all going to die very quickly.



Top Tip: Put Soul Nova on all summoned creatures. They then go bang.



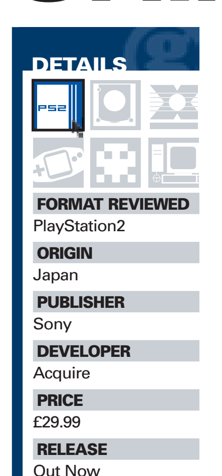
Here come the Bone Horrors. They're coming to get you.



They all look tough until they are suffering from Bleeding, Blindness and you've cast Rotting Flesh on them.

NOTHING LIKE SHINOBI, HONEST

SHINOBIDO: WAY OF THE NINJA



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Acquire

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

At first glance, *Shinobido: Way Of The Ninja* looks so much like *Tenchu* that it would be easy to dismiss it as a soulless clone. When you learn that the people behind the two original games are developing it, however, it becomes a lot more interesting. *Tenchu* has suffered under the care of K2 in recent years and Acquire has been working on its not-exactly-stellar *Way Of The Samurai* series, but ninja stealth games is were where it excelled in the past. It's still worrying that the controls, stealth-kill animations and sound effects haven't changed since1998, though.

Although the game's mechanics are all but identical to *Tenchu* – consisting, mostly, of sneaking up behind guards and stealth-killing them, running along rooftops, wall-running, assassinating and other such ninja staples – the premise is completely different. The protagonist is essentially a freelance ninja with no specific loyalties, serving each of the three lords in the game without the knowledge of the other two. Building up trust with each of the warlords comes with great benefits, but if you are discovered working for a particular lord the others will have something to say about it. You always have a choice of missions, punctuated by one or two necessary ones – ones to the ninja hero's own ends, for instance, or assassinating prominent army generals in order to weaken a lord.

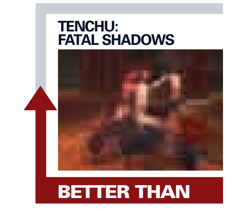
These essential missions, though, tend to be unfeasibly difficult. Executing a task properly can take upwards of 20 minutes, one mistake can ruin everything instantly; there's no retry, and no way to save mid mission. There's also more of an emphasis on hand-to-hand combat, as powerful enemies are immune to stealth-kills, but the one-on-one combat controls are not exactly perfect; taking on more than one foe is all but impossible, and cornering your target is just as tricky.

More importantly than its frustrating difficulty, however, *Way Of The Ninja* just feels tired. We've done sneaking and stealth-killing loads of times before now, and it's beginning to lose its novelty factor. Missions are always 'deliver a box', 'steal a box' or 'kill some people', and it gets old quite fast, especially when even the merest of mistakes often ruins a mission and means you have to reset the console to avoid upsetting all the lords. There is still a certain visceral satisfaction to a perfect execution, but stealth games like this require an awful lot of patience – patience that, for us at least, is beginning to tire. *Shinobido* is well constructed and satisfying at its best, but it could have been made years ago. Fans of the genre will find a lot to like here, but it offers nothing new.



SAME OLD NINJAS

TENCHU: FATAL SHADOWS



BETTER THAN

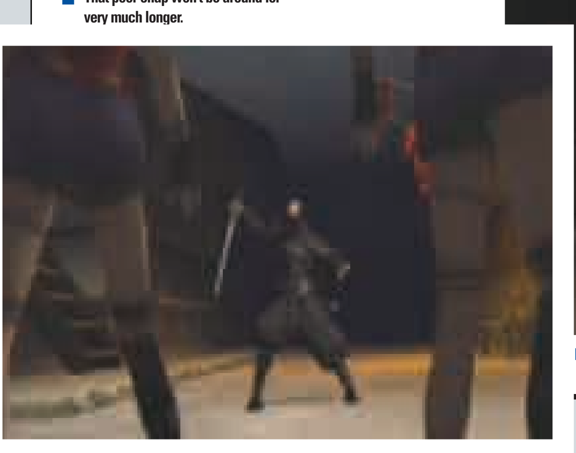
WORSE THAN



TENCHU: WRATH OF HEAVEN



That poor chap won't be around for very much longer.





Ahh, your rival ninjas. These ladies (as well as a few chaps and some armoured sorts) start to turn up when you perform well – making things EVEN HARDER.

games™

MISSING LINK

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

NEW: *Shinobido* desperately needs an injection of innovation. This game is *Tenchu*. *Tenchu* done well, admittedly, but it's pretty much template in terms of gameplay.

"A SLOW, WHITE, GEEKY CHUMP"

AND1 STREETBALL

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Black Ops

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Street basketball is an effortlessly cool game. Attitude, style and skill are blended together and sprinkled liberally over the foundation of a solid sport, giving birth to a pastime that is as much about culture and expression as it is athletic endeavour. As captured in movies such as *White Men Can't Jump* and games such as *NBA Street* and *NBA Ballers*, the trash-talking, fast-hands-and-heavy-dunks style of basketball is far more suited to 'the street' than football, be it association or American.

This fact has been reflected in the games that have represented streetball to date. *NBA Jam*, *NBA Street*, *NBA Hoopz* – all entertaining, flashy videogames that capture the sports' essence excellently. Now joining their ranks is Ubisoft and Black Ops' effort *And1 Streetball*, named after the world famous street team, and featuring luminaries such as Hot Sauce and AO. Not quite Jordan and Bird, are they?

No, is the firm answer to that question. Michael Jordan and Larry Bird, for all their ability, could never slide across the court without moving their feet, or shift sideways five feet while mid jump. Or freak out *Jacob's Ladder* style when trying to post up, for that matter. *And1*'s players can, because they're taking part in an unfinished mess of a basketball sim that is an insult to its name and the culture it represents.

Stripped down to its essence, basketball is quite a simple game. Rotate the ball, look for an open man, and score. It's been a mainstay of every basketball game ever. Not *And1*. No, in *And1* you're encouraged to waggle the right analogue stick to outfox and eventually break the ankles of your immediate opponent while he dances around like a CJD-addled Lego man, before driving to the basket and performing a weakly animated dunk.

Passing is dreadful, rarely going in the required direction and never playing the ball in front of an advancing player. Incredibly, defending is even worse. Steals are entirely arbitrary, seemingly decided at random by the CPU, and any hope of playing remotely tactical 'D' is butchered by your team-mates' complete unwillingness to do anything but stand still.

With core mechanics this flawed, no amount of cut-scene-laden story modes, create-a-move editors or unlockable extras will make up for what is a truly putrid videogame. Street Basketball is still cool. *And1 Streetball*, though, is most certainly not.



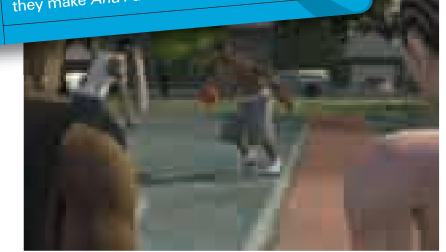
VERDICT 2/10
TERRIBLE IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD

BREAKING YOUR ANKLE
BETTER THAN

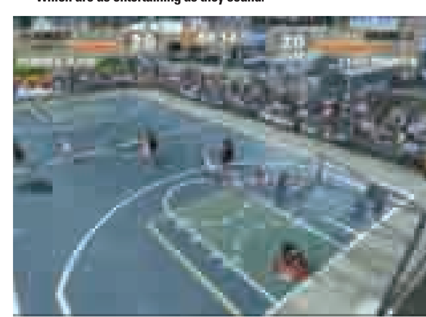
WORSE THAN
NBA STREET



MISSING LINK
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE
HOPS AND BARLEY: Players really need an injection of adrenaline. Slow, unresponsive and seemingly unaware of the rules of basketball, they make *And1* a miserable experience.



The Mix Tape tour is interspersed with *THAW*-style cut-scenes, which are as entertaining as they sound.



Any thought of tactical play goes out of the window upon realisation that player movement is non existent.

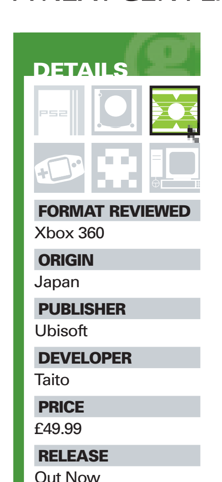


This cretin shouts throughout each and every match, making for an even more painful experience.

OVER G FIGHTERS

A NEXT-GEN FLIGHT COMBAT SIM COULD BE SPECTACULAR. THIS ISN'T…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Taito

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

Although flight sims in general remain the preserve of PC gamers equipped with keyboards and joysticks, Japanese developers such as Taito and Namco prefer to configure their simulations for console joypads. With *Over G Fighters*, Taito maps its arcade/simulation hybrid to the lovely Xbox 360 controller. So, is this a real next-generation fighter, or what?

Certainly *Over G*'s front end is nothing spectacular. The menus and title screen are simple, low-res affairs – very 1996. The in-game action, though, is slightly more in line with what you'd expect of a 2006 vintage flight sim. The game moves along at what appears to be 60fps, and there's no slowdown at all. However, although textures on planes and buildings do hold up to close inspection, and even though the ground does look appropriately Earth-like from any distance, the sensation of velocity is unconvincing.

There are four perspectives available, but only the in-cockpit views provide any decent compromise between the problems that afflict the other cameras. From this perspective you have a splash of the dashboard controls in view to provide some contrast with the action outside – which you can gaze at using the right-hand analogue stick – but it feels like you're travelling in slow motion. On the other hand, the third-person, behind-the-plane view feels much quicker – especially when flying low – but movement is strangely jerky in this setting. There's just no perfect choice.

Fortunately, controls are simple. You can choose to invert up-down inputs for a realistic flight experience, leaving the face buttons free to fire missiles and switch between various modes of flight: a battle-ready setup, a simple Cruise mode, and a ready-to-land option. The left and right triggers are used to control velocity and brakes. There are more advanced controls available when called for – tap Select, for example, and you'll get an in-game menu of strategic options which can be utilised without having to pause the game – but most of the time you can get by quite nicely by staying on course and firing missiles at the appropriate points. *Over G* is more arcade than sim. However, it's not a complete lightweight.

The game's main Scenario mode is a story-driven, non-linear sequence of missions, which plays out across various trouble spots around the globe. Your role is as a member of the Energy Air Force – which Taito used as the title for this series until now – a global peacekeeping team, and embark on missions assigned to you by commanders in the Air Force and explained by

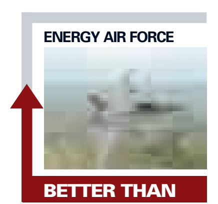
FAQs

Q. SO DOES OVER G ROCK?
A. Like only Aerosmith can, yes, rock it does. Be ready for the very crudest brand of trash rock to blare from your speakers.

Q. CAN WE SEE THAT AGAIN?
A. Yes. There's a replay feature and complete mission replays can even be saved to hard disk.

Q. ANYTHING LOST IN TRANSLATION?
Yes. But even the Japanese version features a weird Japanese take on the English language. *Over G* is not a literary masterpiece. In fact, it's not any kind of masterpiece.

ENERGY AIR FORCE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ACE COMBAT 4

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

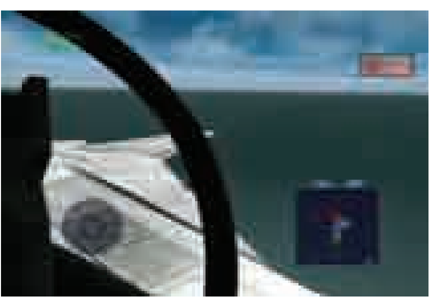
FLIGHT IN FORMATION: During the review process, we found that most of the time there were no Japanese *Over G* players online – in spite of the fact that the game was released there a few months ago.



Now all you need is Goose, Maverick and some hot aviator shades and you have all the ingredients for a classic Eighties blockbuster.



Flying low over the surface of the Earth brings with it moments of what can only be described as moderate excitement.



Use the right analogue stick to look out over the Atlantic. Feeling woozy yet? You soon will.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

RUSH OF BLOOD: *Over G* features just one outstanding idea: fly like a maniac and your pilot will become nauseous causing the screen to change colour. Do a loop-the-loop and the screen will dim, even dipping into a red wash of increased blood pressure, before clearing again.

Take offs are fun, and occasionally quite frightening – especially if you've had a drink…

GROUND CONTROL

The only time *Over G Fighters* becomes exciting – and even that's an overstatement – is when your plane flies low over the surface of the Earth. Although most of your time is spent airborne and at a high altitude, there are occasions when you must land mid-mission and plenty of other times when flying at a low altitude over the sea or above military bases is necessary to complete the mission. Thanks to *Over G's* excellent system of displaying your nausea you have to be careful to make your descent gradual.

other political figures. The background information isn't really necessary (and it can be skipped, so don't worry), but it does add flavour to the game. Once your team arrives in an assigned area – East Africa, Washington DC, wherever – the missions there can be tackled in any order, and how you approach those missions dictates which new assignments are proposed subsequently, which in turn increases the replay value of Scenario mode.

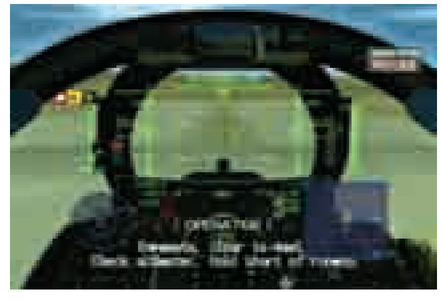
Unfortunately, although the game's style of progression is innovative, missions themselves are typical of all flight combat games. Take out the enemy aircraft in direct clashes, prevent them from attacking convoys and bases, defend given areas, carry out reconnaissance work – there's nothing new here at all. Which is not a completely bad thing in itself, but missions are short, usually five minutes a throw, and generally repetitive. The scenery changes from location to location, but the game doesn't.

Once you've worked through Scenario mode, your attention will shift to *Over G's* Challenge option, which provides all of the main game's locations and craft in fully configurable form. You can take any plane into any setting for old-fashioned dogfights. Over Xbox Live there are also multi-player options which enable you to shoot at friends with any of the craft at your disposal. There isn't much lag here, and as the controls are immediate and solid, everyone plays on roughly the same level – no matter how skilled you are, everyone in the game has a decent chance of victory. In part, though, that's because of missiles.

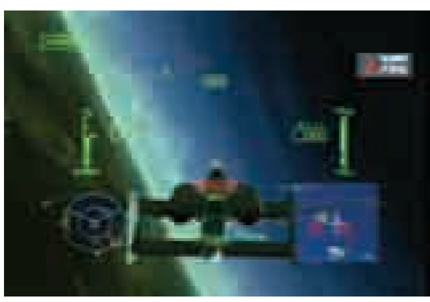
In fact, the main problem with *Over G's* arcade leanings is weapons based. You can use missiles – equipped as standard to every plane – to work through Scenario mode, and you can take these lockable weapons into multi-player as well. Because they lock on and are so very effective, not only is there little need to use *Over G's* customised weapons, but there is also only a modicum of skill required to take out an opponent. This ease of play combines with the game's slow pace to undermine all Taito's good intentions.

Over G Fighters is the first proper Xbox 360 flight sim from Japan, but if you're expecting a true next-gen experience, or even just a thrilling flight, you'll be left with an overpriced ticket to a destination you don't really want to visit. Until Taito catches up, stick with Namco's *Ace Combat* series.

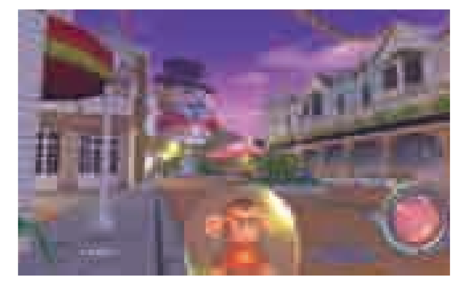
VERDICT 4/10
NOT A TRUE NEXT-GENERATION FLIGHT SIM



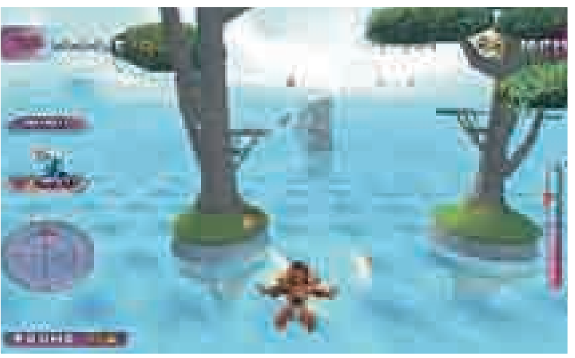
Honestly, it's English, people, but not as we know it. *Over G* has a rather strange brand of Japanese English.



Over G's best feature is the way that it indicates nausea in your pilot by dimming the display.



■ As everyone knows, GonGon is the best of all the Monkey Ball monkeys.



■ Anyone familiar with the sublime monkey target will be at home with some of Adventure's flight-based tasks



■ This friendly fellow is the king of all the monkeys; he doesn't make much sense when he talks.

SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

A GAME TO MAKE KIDS CRY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Traveller's Tales

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Punishing. Perhaps not the word many would expect to best describe Sega's first outsourcing of its Monkey Ball IP, but few would disagree after a couple of hours in its company. Despite the bright colours, cute simians, jolly music and overarching joyous abandon, *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* is a tremendously difficult videogame. And phenomenally frustrating to boot.

While the PSP's nub may be partly to blame (GameCube's analogue stick makes life a little easier), when just the second challenge in the game involves a micro-precise top-down bounce between some 15 spring-loaded flowers, with zero margin for error, you know you're in for a fight. And it doesn't let up. *Monkey Ball* has always been a pretty difficult game, and its first foray into the world of the 3D platformer is certainly no different.

Split into five hub-words, the universe of *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* is vibrant, pleasant on the eye and beautifully structured. Taking cues from Nintendo's back catalogue, each area contains inaccessible paths that require abilities learned at later dates, or teasing distant islands that initially seem beyond reach. In theory, life in the Monkey Kingdom should be as enjoyable as its mushroom-based equivalent. Unfortunately, rolling around in a monkey ball is not nearly as fun as it might seem, and without the challenge of a strict puzzle, it trails far behind most platforming adventures.

Only when quests and tasks are activated does the game begin to shine; the variety of challenges is excellent, ranging from flying from tree to tree via cannon blasts or point-to-point races against the clock to be in position for a photograph. On the whole they're thoroughly entertaining – although exceedingly tough – but it's the traditional *Monkey Ball* 'puzzle trays' that prove to be *Adventure's* downfall.

At certain points during the expedition, the player will be transported to levels in the design of the original *Monkey Ball*, and it's a blessing. It's just a far more entertaining form, and it makes Story mode seem dull by comparison. While we admire Sega's ambition to broaden the *Monkey Ball* experience, it has to be said that sometimes less is more. Still, with 50 of these 'trays' available from the start, and a host of multi-player party games, *Adventure* is still a strong simian package. Sadly, it will probably leave fans of the series hankering for a more traditional slice of monkey pie.



VERDICT 6/10

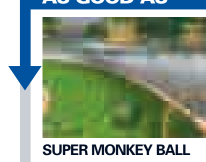
AMBITIOUS, BUT TOO FRUSTRATING FOR ITS OWN GOOD



MEDIEVAL RESURRECTION

BETTER THAN

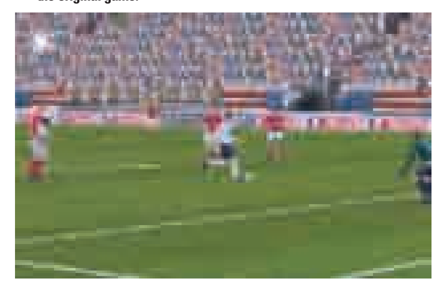
AS GOOD AS



SUPER MONKEY BALL



Player likenesses are impressive – and a significant improvement on the original game.



Long, labyrinthine runs and spectacular goals are far easier to achieve than on other football titles.



There are 70 teams to choose from, but everyone still picks Brazil.

WORLD TOUR SOCCER 2

FAST, FURIOUS, FORGETTABLE FOOTBALL

FORMAT REVIEWED
PSP

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Budweiser released an advert not too long ago to commemorate a new football sponsorship deal. A rumbling American voice-over announced all of the outlandish changes that it wished to introduce to the beautiful game – half-time multi-ball, point-zones and suchlike – while images of oafish gridiron players clashing with baffled footballers rolled underneath. As ads go it was both clever and funny, successfully playing with British fears of Americanisation and our puritanical love of football. Playing *World Tour Soccer 2* brings this advert to mind – it's football but spruced up and shinier.

Pro Evolution has deservedly cornered the market for years, but its impressive realism didn't translate as well as hoped to the PSP. The original *World Tour Soccer* was a guilty pleasure because it deliberately trod a different path from the super-franchises, taking emphasis away from the final score by awarding points for stylish play with its innovative Challenge mode. As expected, *WTS2* takes this concept and elaborates, leaving a larger though not appreciably better game than the original.

The bulk of this version is split between World Tour and Medal modes, both of which involve playing teams in one of several different match styles – Classic Challenge awards points for good play, All Rounder requires you to give every player a touch of the ball before you can score, and Shot Clock demands that you shoot the ball within 15 seconds of gaining possession. Making progress unlocks more of the 11 possible match styles, and will also give you access to a group of continental All-Star teams.

The action is fast and wholly unrealistic, which encourages the use of skilful luxuries that you're denied in *Pro Evo*. Shimmies, step-overs and turns are all a button press away, and the sliding tackle is refreshingly easy to use. *WTS2*'s main aim is to be fun, and in this it succeeds beyond question. Any initial frustrations at the occasionally poor player and referee intelligence give way to satisfaction with your ability to sail past five players and drill the ball into the net from 20 yards.

There's an overriding feeling of novelty, however, and as much fun as the game can be, it's hard to shake the impression that your interest will wane eventually. This is the edge that *Pro Evo*'s realism affords; screaming volleys are satisfying, but the lack of struggle detracts from your sense of achievement and you soon yearn for the real deal. An option to create a custom tournament would have made *WTS2* a more complete package, but this still has decent value as a companion piece to the straight-faced approach of *Pro Evo*.



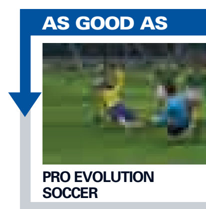
VERDICT 6/10
FUN, BUT A TOUCH LIGHTWEIGHT

WORLD TOUR SOCCER



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER

MISSING LINK
WHATS MISSING FROM THIS TITLE
CUP AND LEAGUE MODES: *WTS2* sets itself the task of being different from the likes of *Pro Evo*, but we would have appreciated a custom tournament option to provide a bit of variety.

TITAN QUEST

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE WE CLICKED LIKE THIS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Iron Lore

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-7

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 4/AMD Athlon XP, 512MB RAM, 64MB graphics, 16-bit sound card

The words 'action-RPG' have been used to describe everything from *Zelda* to *Kingdom Hearts* to *Fable*, and so it's rather difficult to know what to expect from games that profess themselves as such. Famously conceptualised by *Age Of Empires* co-creator Brian Sullivan, *Titan Quest* seeks to resurrect the action-RPG genre as it was last seen in 2000's *Diablo 2*. It's a simple hack-n-slash collect-'em-up with a classical twist, geared toward online play and customisation. *Titan Quest*'s enormous story-driven quest lasts about 30 hours, but we believe that the real meat of this game is likely to consist of the content that players create for each other – the built-in level-editing tools allow for the creation of locales as detailed and intricate as Iron Lore's own.

Titan Quest begins with a simple choice between a male and a female warrior, and then takes them through a supremely linear series of quests and objectives to save Greece, Egypt and finally Asia from various mythological terrors. The left-click is your greatest weapon against the hordes of centaurs, wolf-men, satyrs, various insectoids and other legendary creatures that crowd the gorgeous landscape. It's pure and simple hack-n-slash that plays so much like *Diablo* it's concerning. In the game's initial stages, the only real difference is that only about a tenth of the hundreds and hundreds of items dropped by enemies and found in chests are of any use, meaning that you're endlessly scouring the landscape for anything useful hidden among the endless Ornamented Crescent Blades of Insight and Embossed Pupil's Greaves of Ability as opposed to just picking up everything and anything as was so often the case in *Diablo*.

Thankfully, the game's skills system adds much-needed depth to the clicky-clicky combat. Precisely as in *Guild Wars*, characters choose both a primary and secondary skill specialty, allowing for warrior-necromancers or ranger-healers or other such diverse combinations. Points are then distributed via a rather complex skill tree in order to craft characters according to individual preference. Of course, the skill system is somewhat more relevant when playing online (the single-player campaign can be played co-operatively, which does somewhat alleviate the boredom of endless clicking and collecting), when a balance of talents is advantageous or even necessary to success. It's here, once the player is given the freedom to govern their character's development, that *Titan Quest* begins to show its strength – although equipment is universally governed by what falls to the ground with defeated enemies as opposed to preference or even efficacy, skills are

FAQs

Q. WHAT ARE THE CHARACTER CLASSES?
There aren't any. Everyone looks the same under the armour. It's all about what skills you pick.

Q. OKAY, SO WHAT ARE THE SKILL SPECIALTIES?
The usual. Attack, Defence, Necromancy, Naturalist, Rogue, Ranger and Earth or Storm Magician.

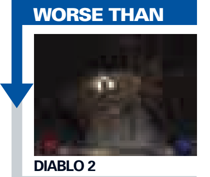
Q. AND I CAN HAVE TWO SKILL SPECIALTIES?
Yes, leading to a total of 28 different combinations. Excitement!

SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



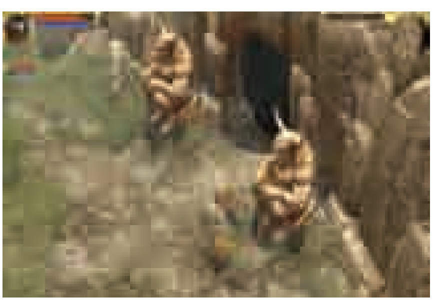
DIABLO 2



A silly performing Egyptian man doing his bit for his country by hiding and dancing like a coward while we cut through swathes of beastmen.



As might be expected of an ancient world, there are lots of undead and a few horribly powerful Titans.



Ooh, how inviting. You just know there won't be any horrible monsters in there!

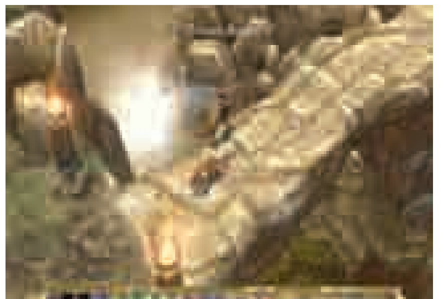
GLOBAL

TAKING GAMING ONLINE

COMBINE: Working through the single-player with friends makes it much more enjoyable…
CREATE: …but the real online meat is the chance to create and fight in intricate user-created maps.

crafted entirely according to the player's fighting style, which forms an attachment to the character that the game would otherwise find hard to provoke.

The problem, though, is that *Titan Quest* is not the only game to have adopted and championed *Diablo's* particularly simplistic style of gameplay. Practically every other MMORPG out there is based on exactly the same dual principles of killing and collecting, and their advantage is that they are set in a perpetually evolving world where your character will never lose value. Once you finish *Titan Quest's* main storyline, your hard-crafted and equipped-to-the-nines warrior is essentially rendered useless until Iron Lore graces us with an expansion pack. *Titan Quest* also lacks the ease of trade and communication which so benefits massively multi-player online games, and it's difficult to shake off the feeling of pointlessness which ends up permeating the game. There's little sense of reward for all the grinding and collecting and endless clicking.



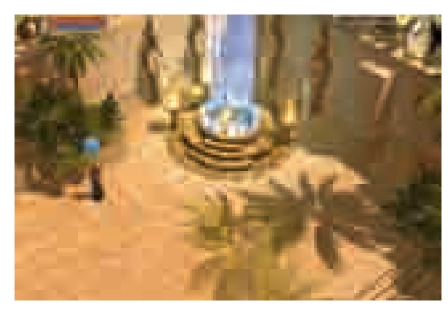
Titan Quest's only unique appeal, essentially, is in its setting – it's a sumptuous looking game and the developer's *Age Of Empires* background is clearly evident in its light-hearted but authentic portrayal of mythological creatures, events and settings. Anyone with the slightest affection for classical myths and civilisations will find much to like about the rolling hills, coasts and ancient cities of the game's mythologically inspired world, not to mention the excellent and often huge-scale bosses, which range from the famous Minotaur at Knossos to Cyclopes to Gorgons in Greece to automatons and golems in Egypt, right through to undead sorcerers in Asia. There's a passion for the classical about this game that anyone interested or educated in such mythology will appreciate, if only in a superficial way – for there is little of the historical or educational depth of *Age Of Empires* here.

In terms of gameplay, there is less creativity evident in *Titan Quest* than might be expected, but it is excellently constructed and just addictive enough to encourage players to make it through to the end. In multi-player especially, it's consistently enjoyable and occasionally compelling, if distinctly old fashioned. What *Titan Quest* offers is an exceptionally pretty and pleasingly presented way to sate the gamer's thirst for killing and collecting – modern gamers, though, will probably find those needs better served by a good MMO.

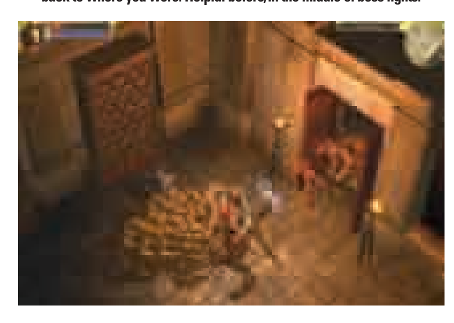
VERDICT 7/10
ADDICTIVE AND WELL MADE, BUT LACKING INSPIRATION

SO… MANY… THINGS

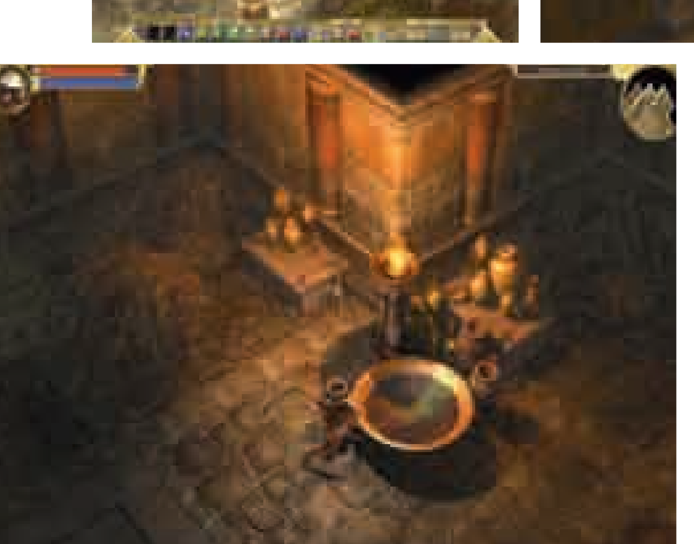
There are hundreds of items in *Titan Quest*. When an enemy dies it drops its weapon, which can yield some fabulous weaponry – but more often than not they'll drop something useless. You quickly come to learn that of all the stuff that litters a conquered enemy camp, only about six items will be of interest – the blue or green highlighted Legendary and Magical items are the only things worth getting excited about, and they're often not appropriate to your character class. If there was a purpose to the items, collecting them might not be so tiresome.



Portals allow for easy travel – warp straight to one and get straight back to where you were. Helpful before/in the middle of boss fights.







The lighting and texturing in the game is exemplary – you'd certainly hope so after six years.

The boss battles can be spectacular – sometimes, it's just a case of clicking and healing until one of you dies.



Catch a falling puppy and all your dreams will come true **Earthworm Jim 2, SNES [Virgin Interactive] 1996**




eMag


RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.46 JULY 2006
00p
POKÉMON
SPECIAL 10TH ANNIVERSARY
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT, THEY SHOULDN'T HAVE REMADE, RETRO CONTACT, THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION, RISING SUN AND MORE…
SUPER MARIO RPG
The 1996 SNES classic revisited
SEGA AGES VOL 27
Panzer Dragoon reviewed inside
BUYERS' GUIDE
RETRO GEAR
Your complete guide to the classic consoles and illustrious software

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Having recently praised Capcom in this very column, I'm starting to get miffed. It's now June and *Street Fighter Hyper Fighting* still isn't available on Live Arcade. There's no official reason for the delay, but based on the network games we've been playing, we'd reckon Capcom is doing further tweaking to get the online games running as lag free as possible.

With Wii just around the corner promising some killer titles come launch, Microsoft needs to step up and start offering more games. Hell, any games for that matter. It seems like ages ago that we downloaded *Uno*, and there's been no new coin-op classics since *Robotron*. Maybe Microsoft's insistence that all games should run in high-definition before they can be submitted is the reason for constant delays, or maybe developers don't feel there's enough interest in the market.

Whatever the case, it doesn't change the fact that I've now been waiting for Capcom's classic brawler for over three months. Any more delays and I'm going to have to fireball someone's ass. Hadoken!

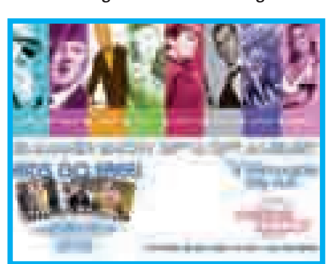


Darran Jones,
Editor – Retro Gamer

GET READY FOR THE UK'S BIGGEST RETRO EVENT

GAME ON

Okay, so it's not exactly devoted to the world of videogames, but this year's Memorabilia Show is already looking to be one of the events of the year. The Summer Memorabilia Show takes place 12-13 August at Birmingham's NEC. The show itself is dedicated to all aspects of music, television shows, movies, comic books and videogames – including retro. It already boasts an impressive number of guests that are bound to get fans in a frenzy over the two-day event, particularly those of a sci-fi persuasion.



Leslie Grantham, Verne Troyer, PH Moriarty who played 'Hatchet' Harry Lonsdale in *Lock Stock & Two Smoking Barrels*, John De Lancie (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s Q), Dean Haglund (Langly from *The X-Files*) and Alexander Siddig (*Deep Space Nine*'s Dr Julian Bashir) are just a few of the stars due to put in an appearance, with many more expected to be announced over the next few weeks. There are lots of competitions and activities, so check out the website for all the latest news on what's going on. Best of all, readers of **games™** will be treated to a special discount. Just take this copy of the magazine along with you to the show where you'll be treated to a special bonus rate.



▲ John De Lancie among others will be there…

PCE GOES Wii

HUDSON SOFT REVEALS ITS FIRST VIRTUAL CONSOLE TITLES

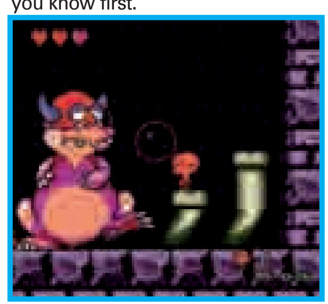
And about time too. After teasing us with playable code of *Bonk's Adventure* (*BC Kid* in PAL territories) at this year's E3, Hudson Soft has finally let a few more juicy titbits of information leak out.

It would now appear that the first three Hudson Soft games to appear on Wii's Virtual Console will be the aforementioned *Bonk's Adventure*, the utterly fantastic *R-Type* and funky platformer *New Adventure Island*. Although its not yet been confirmed by Hudson Soft, we're fully expecting *R-Type* to be the Super CD version that was released for *Turbo Duo*. Although it originally started off on the PC Engine as two separate Hu-Cards, we doubt Hudson Soft is cynical enough to try something similar on Nintendo's Virtual Console. Although if we're brutally honest, we'd



probably end up buying both parts anyway. After all, the original *R-Type* is still regarded by many as one of the greatest horizontal shooters ever created and the PC Engine version was an incredible achievement that convinced everyone that NEC's miniature console was a force to be reckoned with.

If you're not interested in blasting the Bydo Empire, then Hudson Soft has thoughtfully provided *New Adventure Island*, a solid platformer created by the designer of Sega's *Wonder Boy*. Indeed, the rights between the two games are so convoluted that successfully untangling them would be a news story in itself. No news yet on whether all three games are to be launch titles, or if they will even be appearing in the UK, but as soon as we have more information we'll let you know first.



R·O· N·E·W·S· R·E·T·R·O· N·E·W

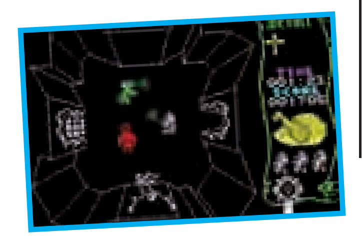
by David Leafe

THE ULTIMATE ONLINE GAME?

EXCITEMENT MOUNTS WITH RUMOURS ABOUT RARE'S BACK CATALOGUE

It would appear that Microsoft's investment in Rare is finally starting to pay off. While we remain unimpressed with *Project Dark Zero* (although it's pretty good fun online), *Kameo* was wonderfully charming, and the incoming *Viva Piñata* is looking very promising.

Forget all that for now, though, as the latest rumour we've picked up could see Microsoft's purchase finally paying off – namely due to the fact that Rare's back catalogue could be heading to Xbox Live Arcade. According to Internet site Eurogamer, Rare is putting the finishing touches to an Xbox Live Arcade version of *Jetpac*, its first ever computer game.





▲ Would *Sabre Wulf* make a great addition to Live?

First released on Spectrum, it's a superb little shooter that sees your pilot collecting ship parts while avoiding (or shooting) each stage's many enemies.

Granted it's just a rumour at this moment in time – Microsoft refused to comment when asked – but it's a rumour with a degree of credibility attached to it. Especially considering all the other Ultimate/Rare titles that would work on Xbox Live Arcade. How about *Vs Sabre Wulf*, which sees you frantically trying to piece together the fabled amulet before your friends; or maybe even high-res versions of Rare's N64 back catalogue? With both Nintendo and Microsoft embracing old content, buying Rare for all those millions doesn't seem that stupid any more…

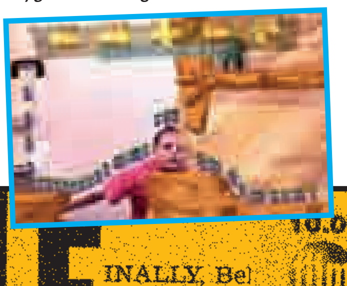
LET'S GO!

SONY ANNOUNCES LEMMINGS FOR PS2

Now, this is a pleasant surprise. After the recent release of *Lemmings* on PSP, Sony has revealed that a new title is in the works for PlayStation2, which should be available toward the end of the year.

Created by Team 17, *EyeToy Lemmings* sounds completely mad, and while it features all of the same levels that appeared in the PSP version, it will also include several new levels exclusive to the home console. Each of these new stages will utilise the EyeToy camera and you'll be able to use your arms to create bridges in order to get the little rodents to safety. *EyeToy Lemmings* boasts far greater precision than previous EyeToy titles, meaning that you should have little problem getting the mop-topped critters home.

These new EyeToy sections are obviously to be treated as little more than a fun add-on to the main game, but it's great to see Sony taking pride in its back catalogue and actually trying to do something interesting with it. Here's hoping that a few other *Psygnosis* titles get resurrected.



Retro DIARY

Old-school gaming is on the up, so games™ dedicates itself to keeping you up to date with what's going down in the world of retro

SEPTEMBER '06

Ultimate Ghouls 'N' Ghosts

Date: 9 September **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

It would appear that Capcom has listened to reason, and while the latest instalment of its classic *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* franchise won't be a walk in the park, it should be a lot easier than previous outings. Oh, and did we say it looks pretty amazing too?

PowerStone Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

More lovin' from Capcom, and this time it's two of the greatest Dreamcast games. *PowerStone Collection* contains both of the *PowerStone* titles, along with new weapons and features that utilise the PSP to its fullest. Gamers will also have the ability to play three other players via Wi-Fi (on *PowerStone2*). Let's hope this means Capcom is considering a brand new outing for this highly underrated Dreamcast franchise.

Taito Legends Pocket

Date: 22 September **Publisher:** Xplosiv **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PSP

It's all about the Retro PSP this month. This third compilation from Xplosiv not only boasts plenty of classic titles like *Balloon Bomber*, *Elevator Action* and *Cameltry*, it also features several enhanced versions. It's a shame that the outstanding *Elevator Action Returns*, while *Bubble Symphony* won't be included, but this is nevertheless looking like another essential compilation.

Gradius Collection

Date: 29 September **Publisher:** Konami **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

We've been playing the Japanese version of *Gradius Collection* ever since it was released back in February, so you'll soon be able to find out what all the fuss is about when it's released in September. Forget the risible *Gradius III* and simply blow all your spare time on the amazing *Gradius Gaiden*. Marvellous.

TO BE CONFIRMED '06

Metal Slug Collection

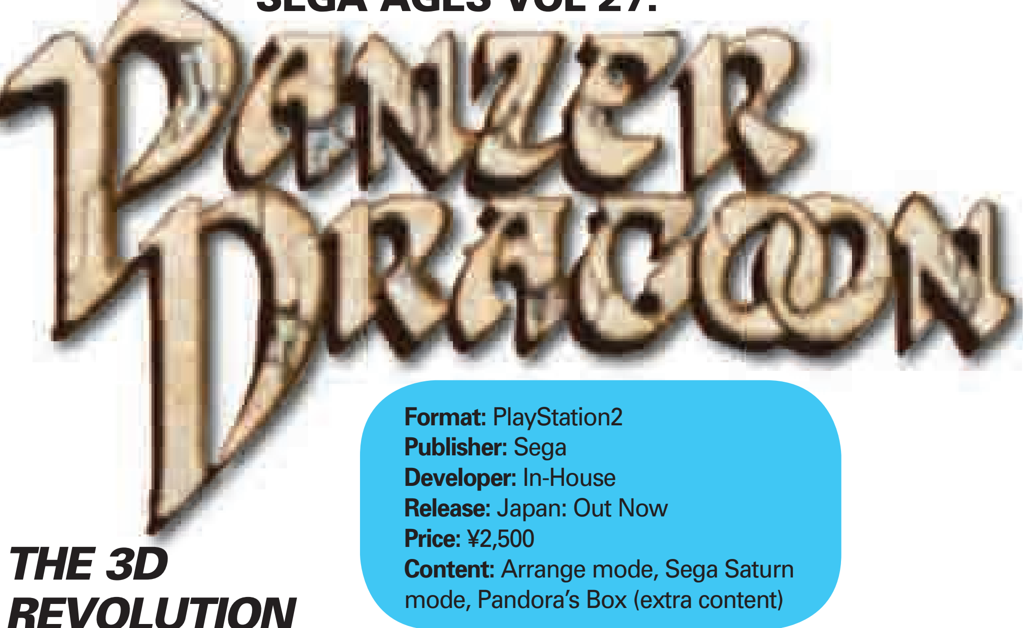
Date: TBA **Publisher:** SNK Playmore **Price:** TBA **Format:** PSP, Wii

SNK hasn't revealed what extras will be included, but considering *Metal Slug 3, 4* and *5* are currently available separately on PS2 and Xbox, this collection already represents excellent value for money. Let's hope we see similar franchises from SNK in the future.

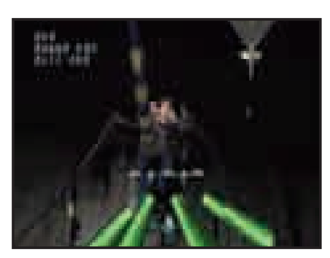




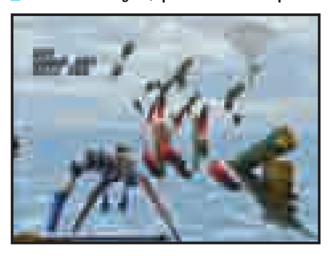
SEGA AGES VOL 27:



Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: In-House
Release: Japan: Out Now
Price: ¥2,500
Content: Arrange mode, Sega Saturn mode, Pandora's Box (extra content)



With *Panzer Dragoon*, spectacular 3D was upon us.



This game is a real retro gaming experience.

THE 3D REVOLUTION

The real charm of retro gaming is all in the playing. Today's technology can conjure visuals of unprecedented magnificence, but this is very often at the expense of good gameplay. Without the distraction of protracted plots and cut-scenes, games were able to focus on getting the most out of the D-pad and sparse buttons. It's refreshing, then, to encounter a retro title whose visuals not only still stand up, but are also unique enough to retain the power to impress. One of the first fully 3D games, *Panzer Dragoon* was always about visual splendour and gained a loyal and well-deserved following when it was released in 1997. Now rightly hailed as one of Sega's crowning achievements, it's no real surprise that *Panzer Dragoon*'s been chosen as number 27 in the *Sega Ages* series.

The treatment given to the titles released under the *Sega Ages* banner has been decidedly uneven – some suffered from shoddily implemented 3D while others had barely been touched at all – and while we have few quibbles over the game itself, *Panzer Dragoon* is not quite the bargain that, say, *Gunstar Heroes* was. Anyone used to getting more than one game per release will be disappointed, and with the Sega Saturn version available for little over five pounds it's difficult to promote this as great value for money. But then again, not every *Sega Ages* game has been of such high quality.

Not only visually pleasing, *Panzer Dragoon* also had the gameplay and a great score to match.



It is testament to the breathtaking invention of the development team that *Panzer Dragoon* still looks and feels like a modern game – thanks in no small part to the score which stands as one of the finest in videogaming history. The graphics have certainly been tweaked and a few creases ironed out, but it's the imagination behind the visuals, and not the technical details, that really shines through. From vast seascapes punctuated by crumbling columns to barren, moonlit wastelands, every environment evokes a new atmosphere. Your enemies are flying fish and giant insects, so beautifully conceived that you can barely bring yourself to shoot them down.

There is menace too, of course, and the abundant beauty all around only serves to amplify its impact. Enormous sandworms thread themselves in and out of the dusty earth, leaping over your head while titanic airships rain flaming missiles down upon you. Comparisons with contemporary combat flatter *Panzer Dragoon* still further; few videogames have displayed the artistry on show here.

There are niggles, of course, but there are always niggles. *Panzer Dragoon* was made at the very start of the 3D revolution, and while this has allowed the graphics to age admirably well, the control method can occasionally jar. Without the luxury of a fully controllable camera, you have to tap the shoulder buttons to rotate your view by increments of 90 or 180 degrees. While not terribly clumsy in itself, the fact that your enemies are so fully mobile can make some of the more erratic ones frustratingly difficult to tackle. The multiple lock-on function of your weapon, however, does much to redress the balance.

It is disingenuous to expect every element of a retro game to age well. It simply isn't the same as watching an old movie. Basic cinema techniques have remained relatively unchanged since the Thirties, while videogame form and style has been relentlessly evolving for 20 years. However, antiquated controls matter little when it comes to a game like this. *Panzer Dragoon* is an experience – the *Ico* or *Shadow Of The Colossus* of its day – and the only real complaint we could make is that it's over far too soon.



They Shouldn't Have Remade…

FINAL FIGHT



Release: 1989
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

▲ Look how camp these guys are. Does anyone ever need to wear trousers that tight?

THE FINAL FLING…

There are some things so inextricably linked in the world of arcade gaming that to experience one without the other would be slightly unnerving. Deep red paisley carpets and chewing gum would be a prime example. Change kiosks and those bizarre Victorian looking machines spewing out metal fun with each pump from the disinterested character behind the greasy Perspex would be another. Noises particular to your own arcade rumbled over all these experiences.

We can guarantee, however, that, should you be in any way familiar with arcade gaming, you'll recognise the enraged scream of Haggar as he performs a spinning clothesline, demolishing everything around him in what can only be described as a savage display of aggression and muscle.

This encapsulates the majesty of the original *Final Fight*: it was a raging, screaming, vein-bursting beast of a videogame that dominated arcades the length and breadth of the country with its camp combat that bore (to the best of our knowledge, at least) very little resemblance to life in a busy metropolitan city. *Final Fight: Streetwise* retained one thing and one thing only from the previous iteration – that slight queerness present in the character design. It's not even worth mentioning the way that Capcom attempted to evolve the game, as we're too busy lamenting the ignoble death of a once proud fighter.

GREAT GAME BOSSES



TINY TOON ADVENTURES: BUSTER BUSTS LOOSE

AN ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BUFFET OF A CHILDREN'S ADVENTURE

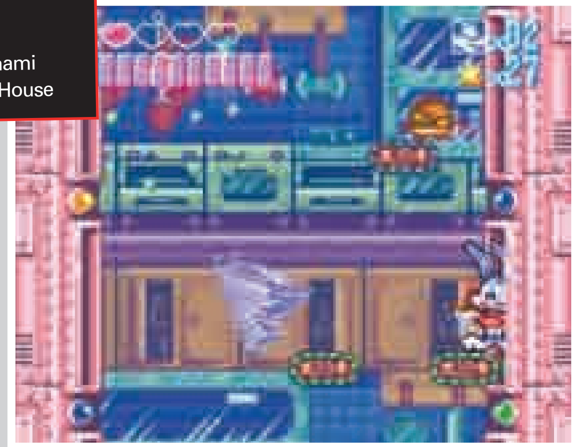
Release: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

When a game is based on a kids' cartoon series, there's a fair chance that it will follow suit and be a fairly simple experience. However, *Buster Busts Loose* managed to win its fair share of fans despite its childish background, by providing an innovation-fuelled romp through movieland.

It's the bosses that really stick in the mind though, and the first of them was Dizzy Devil. He looked a lot like Taz, but wasn't. Taz didn't wear a hat, so it couldn't have been him.

Dizzy was eating all of the food in the cafeteria, much to piggy Hamton's disgust, so you had to stop him – by feeding him all the food in the cafeteria. Knocking conveyer belts from below to nudge various snacks into Dizzy's waiting mouth was neither difficult nor time consuming, but it marked the start of a game that surprised on many levels, and so will always have a place in our hearts. Once Dizzy had eaten all of the food, he fell asleep and became harmless. Bless him.

The game then went on to provide a horror stage, a football match and a sci-fi finale – each boasting their own brand of foe and boss. Though, despite there being many others on offer, Dizzy Devil still remains our favourite of the showdowns.



▲ Aw, look at the little baby Warner characters. Ain't they cute…



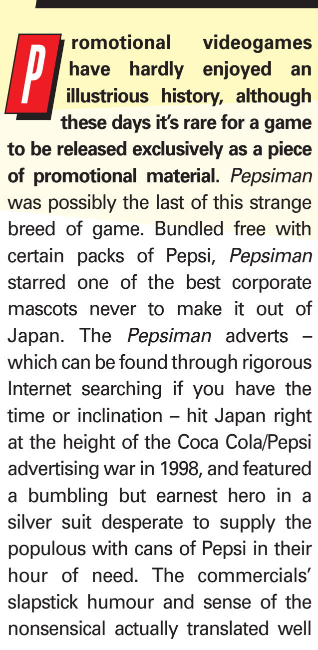
Rising Sun Retro

Thanks to its pirate-friendly construction, the PlayStation was one of the most easily hackable consoles ever, playing random Japanese games had never been so easy. Pepsiman was among the silliest Japan-only PlayStation releases out there, but as well as being something of a curiosity, it actually wasn't half bad...



PEPSIMAN

Release: 1999
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Kid Genius
Developer: Kindle Imagine Develop



Promotional videogames have hardly enjoyed an illustrious history, although these days it's rare for a game to be released exclusively as a piece of promotional material. *Pepsiman* was possibly the last of this strange breed of game. Bundled free with certain packs of Pepsi, *Pepsiman* starred one of the best corporate mascots never to make it out of Japan. The *Pepsiman* adverts – which can be found through rigorous Internet searching if you have the time or inclination – hit Japan right at the height of the Coca Cola/Pepsi advertising war in 1998, and featured a bumbling but earnest hero in a silver suit desperate to supply the populous with cans of Pepsi in their hour of need. The commercials' slapstick humour and sense of the nonsensical actually translated well to the game which was surprisingly not an entirely soulless piece of advertising. It may have been created purely to promote Pepsi (it even has a warning on the front saying, "This is not really a game, it is an interactive Pepsi advertisement!"), but it was quite fun.

Playing like a demented version of *Paperboy*, *Pepsiman* is best described as a 'running action game'. Called by a punter in need, Pepsiman runs as fast as he can to deliver cans of Pepsi, running an obstacle course of giant Pepsi cans, fat men on fridges, pitfalls, wayward tractors and other assorted nonsense to get to his destination. *Pepsiman* never pretends to be anything other than a shameless advert – it even takes advantage of its status to produce a few laughs, slapping Pepsi logos on the most gloriously inappropriate things, littering the game with amusing fake logos for other soft drink companies and vastly over-emphasising the joyous reactions of the waiting crowds when Pepsiman finally delivers his cola goodness. It was quite varied, as far as 'running into the screen' goes; Pepsiman was put in a huge variety of distressing situations, requiring him to surf or ride barrels out of his predicament.

The slapstick humour of the Japanese TV commercials (which usually ended with Pepsiman being carted off to hospital) also contributed to the game's simple appeal. Mostly, Pepsiman would get seriously hurt in some way at the end of levels, while during them he was subjected to humiliations from having barrels stuck on his head to being slapped by fat women (and, of course, falling down holes, getting run over by tractors and other such routine gameplay hazards).

It was *Pepsiman's* sheer blatancy as a piece of advertising that made it so entertaining. Made with a sense of irony and considerable humour, it was a simple game; in terms of the way it played, it had far more in common with 8-bit or 16-bit games than its PlayStation counterparts. It's a fantastic curiosity and a supreme example of the differences between Japanese and Western advertising culture. Shockingly, American eBay vendors are trying to charge £40 for a game that was essentially free at release – we're sure there are crates full of the game in the back of Japanese warehouses. In a way, it's a shame that this didn't make it to the West; we seem to remember that our Pepsi adverts were distinctly rubbish…



▼ Flagrant use of the Pepsi logo was all part of the ironic charm of this piece of advertising merchandise.



▲ Roll out the barrel, Pepsiman's a-comin' down the road, ready to quench your thirst.



STAR WARS [Arcade] Atari, 1983 – Original US Advert



Greatest RETRO Game Ever

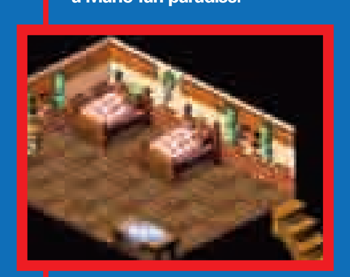


Super Mario RPG

Thanks to Nintendo's chronic neglect of the European market back in the Nineties, only intrepid importers got to sample Mario's last SNES adventure – a great pity as it was one of the system's best titles…

FAN SERVICE

Aside from being easily the funniest Mario game ever to have been made, *Super Mario RPG* was absolutely packed with self-indulgent little Nintendo references and fan-pleasing occurrences. Samus Aran of *Metroid* fame and Link from *The Legend Of Zelda* could be found asleep in inns and guest rooms if you looked hard enough; little Toads played with little Mario and Peach dolls; and in the middle of Booster's Castle there was a great Easter egg that saw Mario temporarily revert to his 8-bit form. That, of course, was on top of all of the Nintendo-themed humour, quips and irony that littered the entire game – it's a Mario-fan paradise.



▲ The game's humour and appeal remains.

Release: 1996
Format: SNES
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: SquareSoft

Apart from the *Dragon Quest* and *Final Fantasy* titles on the NES and SNES, Square was jointly responsible for the glorious *Super Mario RPG* – the last Mario game made for the system – and a most charming RPG. The game mixed elements from the *Super Mario* platform titles with RPG structure and depth. It remains, as far as we're aware, the only RPG with a jump button – discounting its spiritual sequels, the *Paper Mario* games on N64 and Cube.

As well as engaging in turn-based battles, exploring towns, talking to villagers and levelling up, Mario also spent a lot of time collecting coins and jumping over platforms as in his previous games. It wasn't quite an 'action-RPG', but it was by no means traditional either; it was easy to play and enjoy. There was no level-grinding, no random battling and none of the other annoyances that traditionally plague the RPG genre, and to top it all it had a delightful Nintendo flavour that had fans grinning from ear to ear and Nintendo-haters – of which there were far fewer in the Nineties – trying hard not to crack a smile.



▲ Almost every Mario character enjoyed a cameo.



The novelty of seeing Bowser, Mario and Peach fighting together in a turn-based battle was amusing enough, but Square treated Nintendo's characters with amusing insight and delightful flippancy. Bowser was portrayed as an unhinged egomaniac trying to mask his humiliation at having his castle nicked at the beginning of the game; Mario's habit of remaining mute was relentlessly mocked, driving him to conduct elaborate re-enactments of recent events every time he had to explain something to another character; and Princess' tendency to get kidnapped was groaned at by practically every inhabitant of the Mushroom Kingdom. Here was a game that took the piss out of its own source material, which, coupled with some well written dialogue, made it a very funny game.

As well as lampooning what was already there, *Super Mario RPG* introduced many new faces into the Mario canon, most of which have unfortunately been neglected since (perhaps as a result of the ensuing animosity between Square and Nintendo). Mallow the 'frog', Geno (a more *Final Fantasy*-style character) and the game's big bad guys, the Smithy Gang, have all but disappeared from the series now, but they were well characterised and likeable, even if they lacked the immediate appeal of Nintendo's personalities.

The story rockets along with pace and panache, leading Mario through varied, beautiful worlds that surpass the scope of the Mushroom Kingdom alone. At the time, this was about as far from the simplicity of 'rescue the Princess' as a Mario game could conceivably go. The game was also the first almost-3D Mario game, and its Nintendo-style presentation, brightness, stylisation and isometric viewpoint made it one of the most



All ages loved this game, although it's unlikely younger gamers actually had the money to import it from America.

"IT INTRODUCED MANY NEW FACES INTO THE MARIO CANON"

visually distinctive games on the SNES. Fans were very excited indeed when the very first 3D renders of Mario and pals started appearing in the magazines – renders that preceded *Super Mario 64* by only a year, but still look quite primitive even by that game's standards.

Although turn-based, the battle system was distinctive, incorporating timed button presses to make the process more involving. Princess Peach attacked with slap gloves, fans and the frying pan that she later wields in *Super Smash Bros*; Bowser threw chain chomps around with wanton abandon; and Mario had his classic hammer. The simplicity of battle was extraordinary – whether you were eight or 18 you could pick it up and play it right from the off.

Super Mario RPG is sometimes dismissed as an introductory role-playing game, but its mix of simple, action-based RPG gameplay was engaging – we're surprised it hasn't been emulated more often in other titles. Not only a fanboy's dream, *Super Mario RPG* was a brilliant and innovative game that deserved to be released across the world instead of being confined to Japan and America. Only the *Paper Mario* games have since taken such a well-loved set of characters and lampooned/paid tribute to them so successfully.



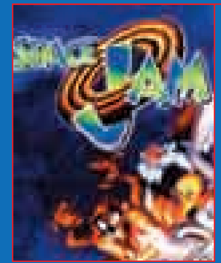


OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1996



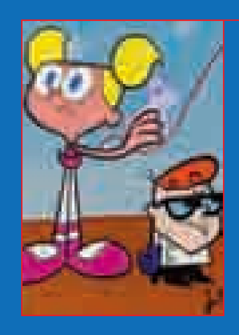
ON THE RADIO

1996 was the year of the Spice Girls. *Wannabe*, the biggest-selling debut single of all time, was released on 8 July and little girls across the world had soon perfected the dance. The Spice Girls were later voted Biggest Cultural Icons of the 1990s – strange as they were ultimately little more than a deeply cynical ploy to sell pop music to pre-teenaged girls.



AT THE MOVIES

Forget *Mission: Impossible*, *Trainspotting*, *Jerry Maguire* or *Fargo*: 1996 brought us *Space Jam*. Starring Bugs Bunny and Michael Jordan, it was the first live-action/animation mix in years and saw Michael Jordan training Looney Tunes characters to beat the Nerdlucks at basketball and avoid being taken to Moon Mountain. It was utter rubbish, but still sticks out in our minds somehow.



ON THE TELEVISION

Genndy Tartakovsky, who later went on to create and direct *Samurai Jack* and *Star Wars: Clone Wars* (two of our favourite animated shows) oh and of course *Powerpuff Girls*, debuted his new series *Dexter's Laboratory* on TV in 1996. We're not sure why, but we liked the little ginger twat. The cartoon's sheer madness was really quite endearing as were Tartakovsky's other cartoons – it probably terrified little children, though.



One of the best games on the SNES, this is a classic that hasn't faded in the ten years since its release.

POKÉMON™

10TH ANNIVERSARY

The world's favourite videogame

Retro Feature



▲ Of all the enduring Pokémon characters, Snorlax remains a favourite.

TO CELEBRATE THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MOST POPULAR GAME FRANCHISE EVER CREATED, GAMES™ TAKES AN IN-DEPTH LOOK BACK AT THE GAMES THAT STARTED IT ALL: POKÉMON RED AND POKÉMON BLUE. FROM SATOSHI TAJIRI'S ORIGINAL MASTERPIECES THROUGH THE GLOBAL PHENOMENON AND UP TO THE PRESENT DAY, THE POKÉMON LEGEND IS ABOUT TO UNFOLD…

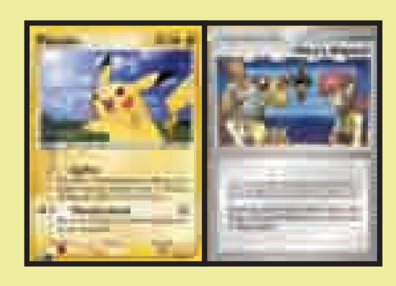
On 27 February 1996, two monochrome Game Boy games called *Pocket Monsters Green* and *Pocket Monsters Red* were released inconspicuously into the Japanese market. Following their unprecedented popularity, *Pokémon Red* and *Pokémon Blue* made the leap to America two years later and found Europe in 1999, where they enjoyed just as rapturous a reception. Now, just over ten years later, the Pokémon games have sold over 143 million copies across six different platforms. This makes it the second best-selling game franchise of all time, coming in just behind Nintendo's own *Mario* series, which has sold about 200 million games in 20 years (compared to Pokémon's ten).

Outside of the videogaming world, we don't need to tell you how influential the brand became – so prevalent and universally popular was the franchise that an entire generation of American, Japanese and European children grew up with Pokémon and its colourful, likeable characters as motifs of their childhoods. In the ten years since its original release, Pokémon characters have graced everything from lunchboxes to jet planes and starred in everything from their own RPGs to *Super Smash Bros* to television shows. Few other brands have proved so enduringly popular over the years, and though it could be said that Pokémon's popularity bubble popped several years ago, current game sales and gamer culture would suggest otherwise.

Last year, *Pokémon Fire Red* and *Leaf Green*, remakes of the two original games, were released and became two of the biggest-selling videogame remakes ever, proving that in the minds and hearts of gamers around the world (not to mention the millions of children who grew up watching the television series, playing the games and buying the trading cards), Pokémon has formed a strong nostalgic bond.

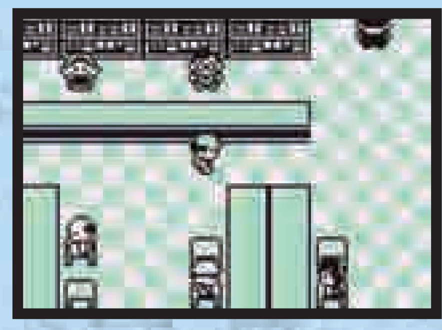
Without a doubt, it was the original games that captured our imaginations and sent the franchise skyrocketing in popularity. Pokémon, at heart, was a coming-of-age story, and its themes of friendship, rivalry, dedication and reward were as instrumental in building the series' popularity as the amenable characters and addictive 'gotta-catch-'em-all' premise. Deeply personal, hugely innovative and above all greatly involving, the fact that the original Pokémon games are so often obscured by the thick smoke of the fad that they created is a real tragedy.

And it's with that in mind that we embark upon this re-visitation of *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* – cut the crap, strip away the layers of merchandising and relentless brand abuse that followed them, dispense with the memories of plush toys, keychains and disgruntled parents, and concentrate on the games themselves. In this special tenth anniversary retro feature, we're going beyond the cultural phenomenon and looking instead to its source – Pokémon is one of the most important, influential and brilliant series in videogame history, and it fully deserves to be remembered as such.



KEN SUGIMORI

AS LEAD ARTIST on the *Pokémon* project, Ken Sugimori was perhaps as instrumental to *Pokémon's* success as Satoshi Tajiri himself. A long-term friend of Tajiri from the days of their Game Freak fanzine, Sugimori was single-handedly responsible for the drawing and design of the first 251 Pokémon – from the Game Boy Advance generation onwards, other artists helped to design the monsters. He also designed the games' main characters: Professor Oak and the soon-to-be-iconic Gym Leaders. He also helped to bring the *Pokémon* characters into 3D with *Super Smash Bros* and *Pokémon Snap* and drew much of the artwork for the first set of *Pokémon* trading cards. It was Sugimori's lovable creations whose faces were plastered all over the world – it was his distinctive and lively art style that made *Pokémon's* characters so very appealing.





WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

As a child in the Sixties, Satoshi Tajiri loved to collect insects. In fact he was obsessive about it. His peers at school gave him the nickname 'Dr Bug', and he spent his youth hunting down insects in fields, woods and ponds. He also loved the arcade and spent many of his teenage years there, while the countryside he had loved as a child was paved and built over. It was a desire to pass on the experience of hunting bugs that he enjoyed so much in his childhood, as well as a real passion for game technology, that led Tajiri to come up with the Pokémon concept.

In a very rare interview with *TIMEasia* magazine in 1999 (one of only about three interviews that the reclusive developer has ever given), Tajiri talks about his love of bug hunting and the creativity he managed to inject into his pastime. "[Bugs] fascinated me. For one thing, they kind of moved funny. They were odd. Every time I found a new insect, it was mysterious to me. And the more I searched for insects, the more I found. If I put my hand in the river, I would get a crayfish. If there was a stick over a hole, it would create an air bubble and I'd find insects there. I usually took them home. As I gathered more and more, I'd learn about them, like how some would feed on one another. So I stopped bringing them home. But I liked coming up with new ideas, like how to catch beetles. In Japan, a lot of kids like to go out and catch beetles by putting honey on a piece of tree bark. My idea was to put a stone under a tree, because they slept during the day and like sleeping under stones. So in the morning I'd go pick up the stone and find them. Tiny discoveries like that made me excited."

Asked if he ever shared the experience with friends – as people share the Pokémon experience with each other – his answer gives yet more insight into the mindset behind the catch-'em-all premise of the games. "None of my friends would do what I did. I got more insects than anyone."

The name of Tajiri's game developer, Game Freak, came from the name of a magazine that he and his friends set up as teenagers. "I was really into *Space Invaders* in about 1978. It got me more and more interested in videogames. There wasn't any media to get information about games, so I came up with *Game Freak* magazine. It was handwritten. I stapled the pages together." He created his first game, *Quinty*, when he was just 16, as an entry in a Sega-sponsored competition, and he learned programming by taking his NES apart to see how it worked. It has recently been alleged that Tajiri suffers from Asperger's syndrome, which would tally with his eccentric reputation and obsessive dedication to his work – he works on a '24 hours awake, 12 hours asleep' schedule when working on a game, and did so right from *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* through to *Ruby* and *Sapphire*.

Pokémon was a concept in his mind, then, for quite a long time, but it was his discovery of Nintendo's Game Boy in 1991, and specifically the link cables, that drove him to pitch the game to the company. "The communication aspect of Game Boy was a profound image to me. It has a communication cable. In *Tetris* – its first game – the cable transmitted information about moving blocks. That cable really got me interested. I thought of actual living organisms moving back and forth across the cable. But everyone was using it to compete. The idea I had was for information to go back and forth. It wasn't about competition. I wanted to design a game that involved interactive communication."

Tajiri never even imagined that Nintendo would accept his pitch. "I was told they couldn't really understand the concept of the game. Game Boy's popularity was declining. Just when I

"I WANTED TO DESIGN A GAME THAT INVOLVED INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION" SATOSHI TAJIRI



CAN'T PLEASE EVERYONE



AS SO VERY many things do, Pokémon attracted a lot of criticism from American puritan members of the Christian church, who claimed that it encouraged Satanism and occult behaviour in children. Among the most absurd objections was that the Pokémon slogan, 'Gotta catch 'em all', sung in the opening credits of the TV series, sounds a little bit like 'Oh Satan' when played backwards.

Christian communities also showed concern over the capture and control of Pokémon, thinking of them as parallel demons in the way that they needed 'magical talismans' (Gym Leader badges) in order to be controlled by humans. There's also the fact that Pokémon evolve, which contradicts Creationism.

It is, however, necessary to mention that Christian objectors were largely in the minority, and the Vatican itself even expressed its approval of *Pokémon* in 2000, stating that the games were "full of inventive imagination" and "celebrate ties of intense friendship".

Certain communities were not calmed, though, and the Cephas Ministry published a pamphlet advising against the 'evils' of Pokémon. This document stated that, "Any child exploring the most popular Pokémon websites will be linked to a selection of occult games such as *Sailor Moon*, *Star Wars*, and others more overtly evil". The Cephas Ministry has also advised parents that, "Pokémon conditions children to accept humanistic wisdom and occult spirituality", among other more worrying accusations and reports of children's spiritual epiphanies as they "burned their cards, warned their friends, and discovered the joy and freedom that only comes from following their Shepherd".

finished the game and took it to Nintendo, I felt like a baseball player who slides into second base even though you know you're going to be out – but then it turns out you are safe."

Though despite his doubts as well as the doubts of its own executives, Nintendo agreed to support Game Freak in the creation of Pokémon. The firm at no point, however, had the game billed as the saviour of the Game Boy that it later became – Tajiri enjoyed taking as long as he needed with his team in order to finish the game and worked often with Shigeru Miyamoto, who Tajiri describes as "a mentor for my heart. […] I really look up to Miyamoto-san," he emphasises. "I think very highly of him. I'd memorise each piece of advice he gave." In fact, in the Japanese version of the game, Ash the hero is named after Satoshi, as he embodies the young Tajiri, and his rival is named Shigeru because he's always one step ahead. Tajiri's relationship with Miyamoto wasn't that of rivals, though – he was definitely a mentor, often offering advice during Pokémon's development.

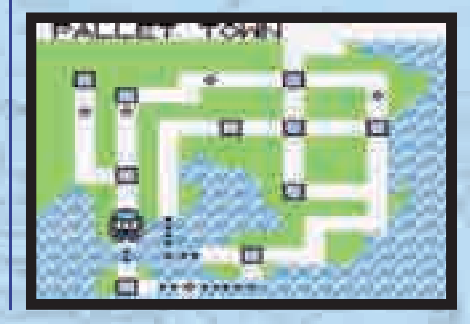
Tajiri finally completed *Pokémon Red* and *Green* in 1996, and the game was released in the February of that year in Japan. Nobody had very high hopes for it, and what was to come over the following ten years would far outstrip what anyone, especially Tajiri himself, expected of the series.

THE BEGINNING OF A PHENOMENON

The result of the Game Freak team's six years of hard graft was *Pocket Monsters Red* and *Green*, collect-'em-up RPGs with the theme of communication at heart. Although almost identical, *Pocket Monsters Red* and *Green* featured slightly differing sets of pocket monsters, making it impossible for a lone player to collect them all – trading with and battling against friends via the Game Boy's link cable was absolutely necessary in order to collect all of the Pokémon and train up the perfect team. It was this theme of trade and communication, this then-unique usage of the link cable, which helped to make *Pokémon* such an addictive and universally popular videogame. By definition, it was an experience that had to be shared with friends; as a consequence, the Pokémon craze spread quickly, pushing software sales astronomically high.

Pokémon Red and *Green* sold 10.23 million copies in Japan and became the biggest selling videogames ever in the region, beating *Super Mario Bros'* record by almost 4 million copies. Today, three of the top five biggest-ever selling games in Japan are *Pokémon* titles, with *Super Mario Bros* and *Tetris* making up the remainder of the quintet. *Pocket Monsters* took two years to make it to the Western world, by which time Japan was already enjoying several series of the Pokémon anime series, waves and waves of merchandise, a trading card game and three Pokémon Centre stores dedicated specifically to selling Pokémon-related products – all of which would soon reach the rest of the world as the brand's popularity continued to grow.

All of that, however, was superfluous to the excellent and engaging games that sparked the whole thing off; although later games in the series have refined and arguably improved the Pokémon formula, their impact was nowhere near as great as that of *Pokémon Red* and *Blue*. They are two of a very select group of videogames that could fairly have been said to have changed (or at least affected) the world – and it was that central theme of communication in Tajiri's mind from the very beginning that really drove their success. Where Tajiri had imagined a few friends sharing Pokémon over the link cable, though, much of the world ended up sharing the Pokémon experience.





Retro

▲ We don't know why everyone in Kanto was so very agressive; you couldn't even walk past someone without having to fight.

Pokémon Red and *Blue* was the coming-of-age story of a young boy from a small-time town, his dream to become a great Pokémon trainer, and the journey he had to take in order to achieve it. Its message, essentially, was about the importance of aspiration and dedication; it took a lot of work to go from receiving your very first Pokémon from Professor Oak to building a team of six, strong enough to take on all comers.

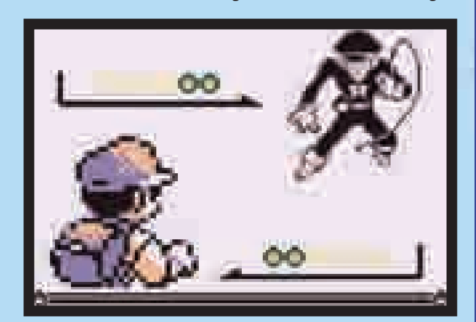
Loosely structured around travelling the world defeating Gym Leaders and collecting the badges needed to take on the Elite Four at Indigo Plateau, *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* created a world that was startlingly believable on Game Boy's little monochrome screen; the game really captured the imagination, and the size and scope (as well as the sheer number of collectable Pokémon) was astounding for such a traditionally limited format.

The 151 varied and elusive Pokémon characters infused the game with life; the huge world of Kanto was packed with different wild species and their presence in every untamed bit of grass and uninhabited cave really helped the game world to come alive. Kanto's huge and varied ecosystem was believable and absorbing and Pokémon affected the lives of everyone on the continent, from your rival trainers to the old man whose Meowth looks after him to the kids who carry Pokémon around as pets. It was a consistent fantasy world, suffused with imagination and opportunity.

Pokémon managed to involve players by making them work hard for their rewards, encouraging them to form strong bonds with the creatures whose growth and evolution they moulded. The satisfaction of victory upon winning a battle was enormous because you knew that your team of Pokémon was something that you had built yourself from the ground up. Every player experienced *Pokémon* in a different way, favouring different types and strategies; it was a particularly personal game, and because no two Pokémon were ever quite the same in terms of stats and moves, every team was unique, letting players experiment with unusual move and type combinations and forge a team that was entirely their own.

It's this personal aspect that made *Pokémon* so very addictive. One of the most inclusive RPGs ever made – perhaps going some way to explaining its universal popularity despite the stats and complexities of battle which could make it seem quite inaccessible – *Pokémon* was a game that everyone and anyone could play their own way. Satoshi Tajiri summed it up fairly well in the interview he gave back in 1999: "When you're a kid and get your first bike, you want to go somewhere you've never been before. That's like *Pokémon*. Everybody shares the same experience, but everybody wants to take it someplace else. And you can do that."

That battle system, too, was key to *Pokémon's* enjoyability. Brilliantly complex and yet also intuitive, it was based around the relative strengths and weaknesses of the six Pokémon and move types, making for a bewildering array of different possibilities. Creating a well-balanced team was crucial and far from easily achieved; hunting for, nurturing and evolving your own super-squad potentially took hundreds of hours (looking back at our own *Pokémon Blue* game clock, it's standing at 130 hrs 56 mins). There was always something honourable about *Pokémon*



▲ The evil presence of Team Rocket pushed the player onwards.



▲ Pokémon designs evolved significantly in subsequent games.



▲ Although loosely based on real-world animals, their style was unique.



▲ Self-referential jokes were hidden cleverly throughout *Red* and *Blue*.

combat; although *Red* and *Blue's* balance was slightly off (Gold and Silver went a long way toward rectifying this with the introduction of the new Dark type), winning was almost always a matter of superior tactics. Tajiri compared it to the ritualistic aspects of sumo: "The concept of [battling with] the communication cable is really Japanese: one-on-one. It's like karate – two players compete, they bow to each other. It's the Japanese concept of respect… It doesn't really get aggressive. It's an intricate style of communication. Almost subtle."

Pokémon was also unique in the way that it somehow managed to make the quite violent concept of pitting captured creatures against each other entirely non-aggressive. Pokémon never died, only fainted, and they could always be instantly revived at the nearest Pokémon Centre. Although the games later attracted criticism for the 'violence' of their concept, there was never anything bloodthirsty about the combat in *Pokémon*. It was a game of strategy, delicate balance and careful forethought, whose emphasis was on nurturing, competing and evolving, not upon destruction – another of the distinctive features that made it so appealing to such a wide variety of audiences.

It's actually quite difficult, all in all, to pick any holes in *Pokémon's* concept. Despite the slight imbalance of Psychic Pokémon, and despite the increasingly repetitive practice of battling other trainers and levelling up your team, the game was so effortlessly endearing that it was all entirely excusable. When *Pokémon Stadium* came out in early 2000 (the year before in Japan), bringing with it the opportunity to battle monsters in glorious, technicolour and fully rendered 3D, it took *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* to an entirely new level all together.

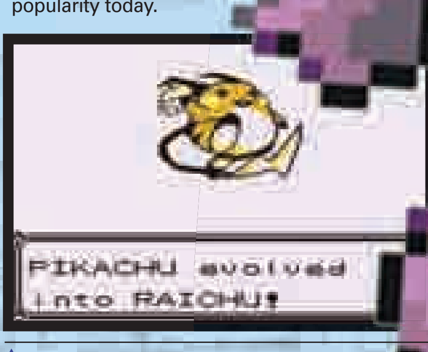
Stadium allowed players to manage their creatures in a hugely sophisticated storage system and let them play the original Game Boy games (along with the subsequent semi-sequel, *Pokémon Yellow*) at five times the speed, which took the onerousness out of training. A year later, *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* added breeding and an inspired night-and-day cycle to the *Pokémon* mix, but the innate appeal was still the same. At heart, every *Pokémon* game from *Gold* to *Emerald* is the same compulsive, endearing RPG as *Red* and *Blue*, although they have sadly seemed less and less inventive as the years have gone by.

"IT'S THE JAPANESE CONCEPT OF RESPECT"

The enormous number of Pokémon now in existence has also diluted the purity of the games in the opinion of many fans. Although *Gold* and *Silver's* extra one hundred Pokémon had their justifiable merits, every addition beyond number 252 can't help but seem a little superfluous.

Pokémon Red and *Blue*, though, will always have a justified and revered place in the memories of gamers worldwide as one of the most universally loved, endearing and distinctive games ever made. There was no guarantee that such a risky concept would succeed, and not even the faintest inkling that it would do quite as well as it did in regions outside Japan.

Disappointingly, in today's modern industry, brands frequently take precedence over the actual games to which they are attached. *Pokémon*, however, stands out as a rare example of a brand that originated from a game in the first place, and one whose unbelievable success stems from invention, imagination and inclusiveness as opposed to the marketing budgets that so often define popularity today.



▲ Elemental Stone evolution – a moral dilemma in the TV series.

WHY POKÉMON?

POKÉMON IS, OF course, a shortening of the Japanese name 'Pocket Monsters', but why was the name changed before Pokémon made it to the West? Aside from the negative connotations of the word 'monster' and the subsequent problems that certain minority American religious communities might have had with it (although that didn't stop some complaining – see Can't Please Everyone), there was actually already a Matchbox line of toys called Monster In My Pocket, making it impossible for Nintendo and Pokémon USA to trademark the name. Konami released a NES game based on the small rubbery toys in 1991, and there was even a little animated series.



GUEST APPEARANCE



▲ Just look at his cheating, chubby little face.

Release: 1993
Format: SNES
Publisher: Interplay
Developer: Blizzard

ROCK N' ROLL RACING

ARE YOU READY TO RACE?

Rock N' Roll Racing **had a misleading title.** Without proper thought it would be easy to assume that the title would be a racing game that featured a host of well-known band members competing for the prize. Not so. The 'Rock 'N Roll' in the title actually referred to the soundtrack that accompanied this space-age racer.

George Thorogood's *Bad To The Bone*, Deep Purple's *Highway Star*, and Henry Mancini's *Peter Gunn* all featured, but despite the lack of celebrity musicians there was one character that may have looked a little familiar: Olaf the overly defensive chap from *The Lost Vikings*. This character could be accessed by holding R, L, Select and tapping Right while not-so-good character Tarquin was highlighted.

Olaf was essentially the cheapest thing on earth – or in space – and losing actually became quite a chore when you used him. Hurrah for silly-high stats. Still, it was a quality cameo for one of our favourite characters of the time. Jackpot.



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT

CHAOS

48KB HIGH AND RISING…

It really is amazing what you can do with 49,152KB, and Julian Gollop proved exactly that with one of the most beautifully crafted videogames ever conceived. This is not some kind of grandiose rhetoric with which to pad out this particular section of **games™**, but a genuine statement of humility and appreciation for a title every bit as graceful, balanced and challenging as a game of chess.

A game for 2-8 friends, *Chaos: Battle Of The Wizards* offered each of the players a random assortment of spells with which to devastate the other mages. Each spell was attributed a percentage of success and an affiliation to either light or dark magic – the more light spells there were in play, the greater your chance of casting a light spell. Ranging from Golden Dragons to rats, and evil forests to castles, the vast array of spells on offer – and their random allocation – lead to perfectly poised matches and the kind of thought rarely offered in videogames nowadays.

An added twist came in the form of illusions and dispels, requiring an extra layer of consideration. Never in the history of videogames have so few done so much with so little.

Release: 1984
Format: ZX Spectrum
Publisher: N/A
Developer: Julian Gollop



▲ Become a wizard in this simple turn-based strategy game. Yes, these are wizards!



NINJA COMMANDO [Arcade] ADK (Alpha Denshi), 1992 – Original Japanese Advert

THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION



THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR WITH A PASSION FOR GAMING IS ANDY O'FLAHERTY, A 25-YEAR-OLD BIOMEDICAL SCIENTIST (YIKES) FROM MERSEYSIDE. AS IS PLAINLY VISIBLE FROM THE PICTURES HERE, HIS COLLECTION NOW SPANS AN ENORMOUS SELECTION OF CONSOLES AND GENRES. WHERE WILL IT ALL END?


▼ Andy can't wait for *Guitar Hero 2*. We couldn't agree with him more.

games™: When did your passion for videogames begin?
Andy O'Flaherty: My interest in games started back in the late Eighties when I was a kid. I'd end up wasting my pocket money on arcade machines, and spent most of my time during overseas holidays in the arcades instead of on the beach. In 1988 I inherited my brother's Commodore VIC 20 – it wasn't until I received a Mega Drive for Christmas in 1991 that the addiction really took off.

g™: How long have you been collecting?
AO: From the Mega Drive days onward (sadly, I no longer own the VIC20), although my collecting soared when I started working as I could buy more games in a small amount of time. On one occasion, I bought 30 games in one go!

g™: Where do you buy most of your stuff?
AO: I tend to buy most of it off the Internet as you can get some real bargains. Before, it was a case of having to hike to the local city centre to purchase the latest release, and maybe have a look around for some of the older stuff. Occasionally you'd come across a real gem, but not very often.

g™: Which consoles do you have?
AO: I own (deep breath) a Mega Drive, Mega CD, Game Gear, Saturn, Dreamcast, Game Boy Advance SP, Super NES, Nintendo 64, GameCube, PlayStation, PlayStation2, PSP, Xbox and Xbox 360.

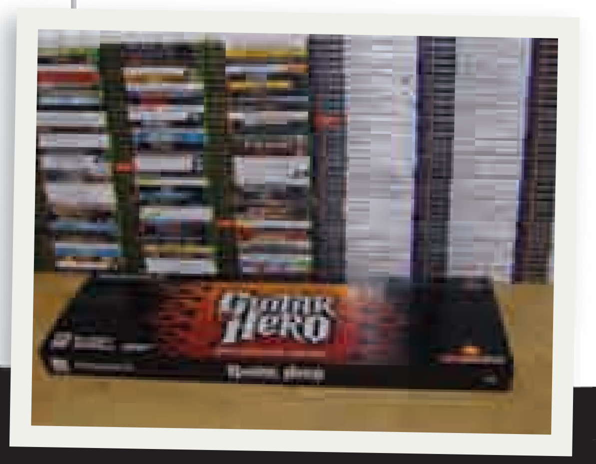
g™: How many games do you own?
AO: I own about 800 games, 140 of which are for Mega Drive alone. I've bought over half of my games in the last five years.

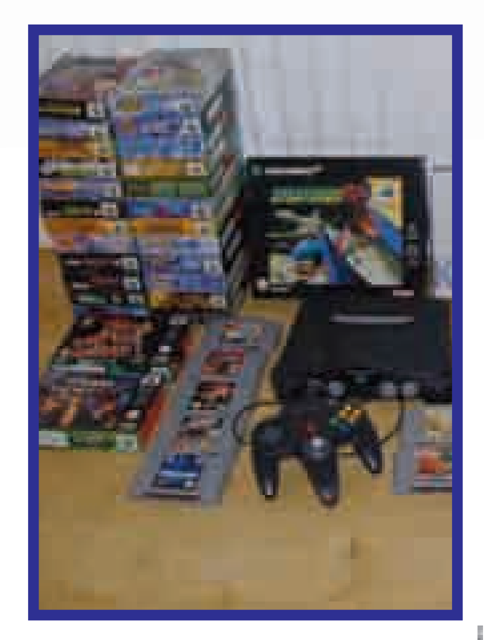
g™: Do you have a favourite console?
AO: That's a tough question as I like each console for a different reason. I didn't think much of Dreamcast as a console, but it did have some amazing games. Also, the Saturn had the potential to be great, but it seemed developers couldn't get much out of it. N64 is easily the best looking console, and PSOne/PS2 have the most comfortable controller. However, at a push, I'd say the SNES is the best; it has the best games.



g™: What's your most prized possession and why?
AO: The collection as a whole means a lot to me as I've had some truly great moments with each console (multi-player *GoldenEye* was amazing when it came out), but obviously I own a few games that are hard to come by these days. The Christmas edition of Saturn *NiGHTS* is quite rare I believe, and I've somehow managed to acquire two copies of *Streets Of Rage 3* on Mega Drive – obtaining just one is difficult these days!

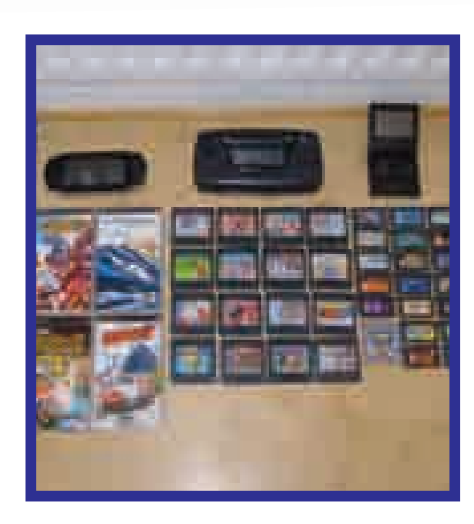
g™: What is your favourite game ever?
AO: This is a question I often think about. It's quite hard to answer as games have changed so much over the years; it wouldn't be fair to compare, say, *Joust* with the likes of *PGR3* as more is possible







We'd like to take a moment to congratulate Andy on the organisation of his displays.



with today's technology. Having said that, the old games needed to have gameplay in spades to make up for the lacking visual element. I would say that my favourite game ever is *Super Mario World* (SNES); it's the only game I've ever played that I couldn't think of a single way to make better. Recently, I was really impressed with *Half-Life 2* (PC) so that can be my runner-up.

g™: What is your favourite genre, and why?
AO: This has altered over time – I really like FPSs, but there are too many now and they're losing their charm. In the old days, I liked fighting and racing games, but again they've become stale. These days I like compilations of old games as they bring back memories. I also like novelty games, like EyeToy and *Guitar Hero* as it's interesting to see what novel ideas developers can still come up with. If a game's good, I'll like it – the genre doesn't matter.

g™: What is your favourite game series?
AO: Probably *Pro Evolution Soccer*, it just captures the spirit of football like no other game ever has. Although I also like *Metroid*, *Street Fighter*, and I do have a soft spot for any game with Sonic in it.

g™: What item is missing from your collection?
AO: There are quite a few games that I'd love to own – like *Snatcher* for Mega CD. The problem is that these games tend to go for silly amounts of money, and as I buy games to play rather than collect, I give it a miss because "I'm not paying that". I'd also like to get round to buying a Saturn import converter so I can play those games for the machine that didn't make it over here, such as *Thunder Force V* and *Radiant Silvergun*. Some of the Japan-only games are truly amazing and most people here don't have a clue they even exist.

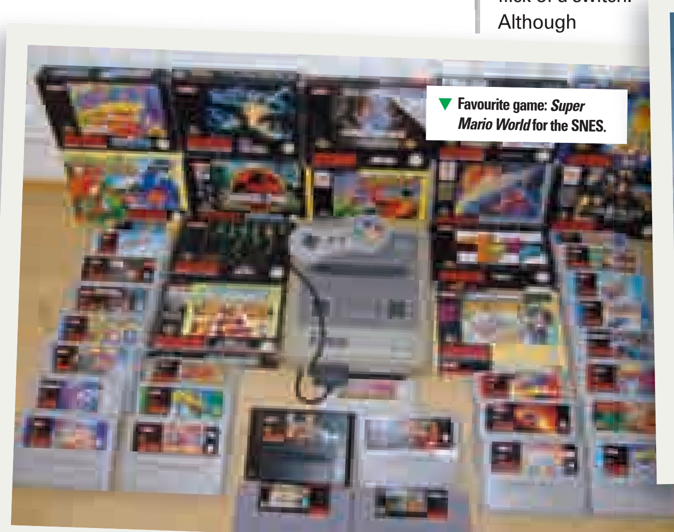
g™: Any idea what you've spent so far?
AO: I dread to think! Easily over 20k just on what I own now. I used to trade games in when I was young, due to having no money (this Mega Drive/Mega CD combo is actually my second; I sold my original ones and the 70+ games I built up to buy my N64). I worked out that if I hadn't traded my old games I'd have over a thousand by now.

g™: Do you play on all your consoles?
AO: Mostly. I've even managed to create a set-up that allows me to switch between consoles at the flick of a switch. Although admittedly PSOne is away in its box since I can play its games on PS2, and I recently put the Dreamcast away to make room for the Xbox 360.

g™: Looking to the PS3 and Wii launches, are you going to buy both?
AO: At this point, I have no idea. I tend to not really pay attention to consoles until they are released. I didn't even know what the 360 looked like till my mate bought one on launch day! But, knowing me, I will probably buy both eventually.

g™: Have you ever discovered a real bargain?
AO: I remember a few years back, I was trying to find *Rolling Thunder 2* for Mega Drive without much luck (well, I did see it for a silly price and swiftly moved on). Then a few weeks later it turned up in a bargain bin in Cash Converters. It was 99p!

g™: What are you most looking forward to playing?
AO: I simply can't wait for *Guitar Hero 2* as I thought the first one was great. I also wish some new games would hurry up and come out on Xbox 360 Live Arcade!



Favourite game: *Super Mario World* for the SNES.



A vast array of games for many different platforms.



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and there's something you'd like to share with the gaming public, why not write to us at: games™ Retro Contact, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ. Or email: gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk

BEST OF THE BEST

Dear games™

I just wanted to congratulate you on the *Double Dragon* and *Bomberman* articles that appeared in **games™** recently. Not only were they both very informative, they were also extremely well written and perfectly conveyed how enjoyable the games were. As I finished reading the *Bomberman* article, it suddenly occurred to me that both games had recently appeared in the readers' Top 100 Retro Games Of All Time. Of course, neither was featured in the same amount of depth – which got me to thinking, why don't you cover all one hundred games from that list? We obviously love the games as we all voted for them, so surely the other readers wouldn't mind reading more about the likes of *Rez*, *Jet Set Willy* and *Gunstar Heroes*, I know I certainly would.

Jake Best

That's a very nice idea, Jake. We've obviously covered quite a few of the Top 100 over the last 45 issues, but we're more than happy to look deeper at the others if there's enough reader demand for it.

SIZE ISN'T EVERYTHING

Hi games™

I would like to say how much I enjoy your Retro section every month. Seeing all of the old adverts and reading about the classics brings back a lot of memories, and it's staggering to see how many great games you can cover in such a small section.

In fact, my only complaint is that the section now seems a lot smaller than I remember. I'm sure that there used to be a good 40 pages dedicated to classic games each month and this now seems to have diminished dramatically. What's going on, guys?

Paul Topping

We're glad you're enjoying the magazine, Paul. When it comes to Retro and your concerns about the size of the section, you're not actually losing that many pages. Retro had hovered around the 28-32 page mark for the last 20 or so issues, so it has in fact shrunk by only five pages. We want to give the magazine a good balance of news, previews, reviews, features and retro. We know how much our readers revere Retro, and will continue to pack in all the quality retro goodness you can handle. Remember it's quality not quantity.

ALL ABOUT DIZZY

Dear games™

Have you ever run a feature on Dizzy? He's one of my favourite 8-bit characters and I've managed to track down every title he's appeared in. Even today his games remain utterly charming to play and I'd happily choose the lovable egg over the likes of Jak or Crash any day. If you could do an interview with the Oliver Twins I would be in heaven. Alternatively, you could simply tell me what issue any Dizzy coverage has previously appeared in.

Keith Winters

We're sorry, Keith, but we featured a rather extensive Dizzy article way back in issue 33. Not only was there a family tree, which covered every game, but the Oliver Twins also provided some rather interesting revelations about the origins of the little egg. Unfortunately we no longer have any copies of this issue in our back issues stock.

Wii FEARS

Dear games™

After reading your news story on Nintendo's Wii, I'm now beginning to have serious reservations about what games will be appearing on it. I'm a huge fan of Japanese games and would love to be able to play the likes of *Umihara Kawase*, *Seiken Densetsu 3* and *Bahamut Lagoon*. I know that English translations exist for these games, but I don't believe in piracy and would never use an illegal copy. Then of course there's struggling with translated walkthroughs, which can also be a pain. I was thinking how nice

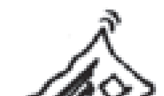


Okay, so who wants to see an in-depth feature on *Rez*?



We've covered Dizzy a few times, so look for the relevant back issue.






STAR LETTER

RETRO IN YOUR HANDS

Dear games™

Is it just me or is PSP becoming the greatest machine for playing retro games on? Not only do you have an incredibly busy home-brew section that now supports an amazing array of emulators, you also have publisher support from the likes of Capcom, Namco and Xplosiv. Capcom, for example, has titles like *Ultimate Ghouls 'N' Ghosts*, *Power Stone* and various other compilations on the way, while Xplosiv is apparently releasing a PSP version of *Taito Legends*. And don't forget the recent collections from Midway, Gottlieb and Namco. Even games like *Ridge Racer* and *WipEout* have retro connections, and look fantastic to boot. So what do you think? Is PSP the best system for retro lovers or can you name another?

Gordon Whitelaw

PlayStation Portable certainly seems to be receiving a fair amount of the old retro loving at the moment, but let's not forget the humble DS. While its home-brew scene isn't advanced, you can still play Game Boy Advance home-brew on it. Then of course you have titles such as *Super Mario 64 DS, Mario Kart DS, Lost In Blue, Sonic Rush* and *Castlevania: Dawn Of Sorrow* – just a few of the games that are based on or are remakes of classic hits from the past. Granted, PSP may be out front at the moment, but Nintendo DS is definitely catching up.

it would be to have English versions that I can enjoy. That's when it suddenly hit me: what if Nintendo was to employ a region lock-out system or simply refuse to have the games translated? Both Nintendo and Xbox Live Arcade have a lot of potential with their download services and it will be devastating if they mess things up.

Graham Day



Will *Bahamut Lagoon* be treated to an official Wii translation?

To be honest, we're still unsure about Nintendo's plans for its Virtual Console service as the company is predictably keeping its cards close to its chest. While it is quite possible that US titles such as *Chrono Trigger* and *Super Mario RPG* will arrive, we can't see Nintendo releasing Japanese titles here, mainly because it would probably have to go to the BBFC for classification (which would prove impossible). Of course, there's always the chance that Nintendo will actually translate the games – as Konami recently did with its *Metal Gear* titles on *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence* – but it's a long shot.

IN DEMAND

Dear games™

What has happened to *Clash Of The Titans*? It was one of my favourite articles in Retro and it was fascinating to see how all the 8-bit titles stacked up against each other. There are so many classics that you've not covered yet, so it would be a shame not to see any more.

David Bright

Don't worry, *Clash Of The Titans* will return. With so many different features to cover in the mag, it was inevitable that a few would fall by the wayside. Fortunately, demand for the feature has been high, so look out for it soon.



The Beggar Prince is now available to buy, check it out.

MEGA DRIVE REVIVAL?

Dear games™

I'm sure I read somewhere in your magazine (or on the Internet) that a new Mega Drive game called *The Beggar Prince* was coming out, but I've heard nothing since. Is this true? Have you played it? Will you be reviewing it? Sorry about all the questions, but the Mega Drive is my favourite console and I adore RPGs (I've completed *Shining Force II* around a dozen times). Any more information about this game would be greatly appreciated.

Matthew Chase

***The Beggar Prince* is now out and is a translation of a 1996 Taiwanese title called *Xin Qigai Wangzi*. Translated by US company Super Fighter Team, the game is available to buy for £29 from www.beggarprince.com. Look out for the Retro review soon.**









BUYERS' GUIDE



It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£40-£60
Goldstar 3DO	£45-£60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£15-£25
Acorn Electron	£10-£25

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-£25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-£25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25-£50
Amstrad GX4000	£20-£60



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£20-£35
Atari ST	£20+ (depending on model)
Atari Lynx	£15+ (depending on model)
Atari Jaguar	£20

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic20	£10-£30
Commodore 64	£10-£30
Commodore Amiga	£20+ (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£20-£50
C64 GS	£30-£50
Commodore CD32	£25-£50



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£60-£200
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£150-£200
JAMMA Compatible cabinets	£100-£350 (depending on model)
Super Gun	£120-£400 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£55-£70
Turbo Grafx-16	£30-£50
Turbo Duo	£120-£180
PC Engine GT	£70-£150
Super Grafx	£80 (prices can fluctuate)



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£1-£200 (depending on model)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-£20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£5-£10
Game Boy Color	£10-£15
Super Nintendo	£20-£40
Virtual Boy	£80-£100
Nintendo 64	£10-£25

SEGA

Master System	£10-£30 (depending on model)
Mega Drive	£10-£20
Game Gear	£15-£25
Mega CD	£40-£70 (depending on model)
Sega 32X	£35
Sega Nomad	£70-£140
Saturn	£30+ (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£25+ (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

ZX-81	£40-£70
ZX Spectrum 48K	£20-£50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70+ (depending on model)
Neo Geo AES (home System)	£150+
Neo Geo CD	£100+
Neo Geo CDZ	£80+
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£35

Right then, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classic games to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to buy. Hopefully we can help. This month we're looking at some of the finest retro fighters you can buy.

IK+

Estimated Price: £1+
System: Commodore 64
Developer: Archer Maclean

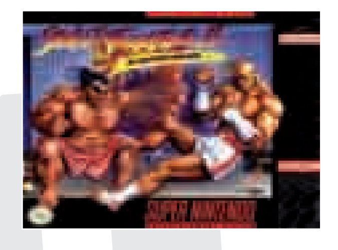
The simple addition of a third fighter gave *IK+* incredible scope that made it a firm favourite with C64 owners. As well as fluid animation, excellent gameplay and stunning sound (courtesy of SID god Rob Hubbard), Maclean also included a superb bonus round and filled the background with all manner of interesting objects (from leaping fish to tiny inchworms). Even today *IK+* remains amazingly playable and should be hunted down by anyone who loves a good scrap.



Street Fighter II: Turbo

Estimated Price: £3+
System: SNES
Developer: Capcom

Although the original *Street Fighter II* proved to be a huge success on the SNES, we'd choose the souped-up sequel any day of the week. Featuring new costumes, a couple of new moves and a healthy speed boost, *Street Fighter II: Turbo* corrects all the faults of the original game and gave SNES owners yet another triple-A brawler to brag about. You should get yourself over to that magical place called eBay for the silver tin edition if you really want to show off.



Tekken 3

Estimated Price: £5+
System: PlayStation
Developer: Namco

Many love *Tekken 2*, but there can be no denying that Namco's third instalment remains the most prized feather in the *Tekken* cap. As well as featuring a selection of new characters (including two exclusive to PSX), enhanced animation and fantastic music, *Tekken 3* also has some utterly bizarre mini-games to enjoy. A sideways-scrolling fighter and a quirky spin on volleyball. A superb sequel that managed to improve on *Tekken 2* in every way possible.



X-Men Vs Street Fighter

Estimated Price: £15+
System: Saturn
Developer: Capcom

Criminally only available in Japan (its UK release was cancelled at the last possible moment) Capcom's *X-Men Vs Street Fighter* is easily the most enjoyable game in the *Vs* series (in our humble opinion of course). Insane aerial attacks, amazing animation – all courtesy of the supplied RAM pack – and minimal loading times mean that this is as close to the arcade game as you're ever likely to get. *Street Fighter* veterans may find it a little over-the-top, but ignore them – this is aces.



SoulCalibur

Estimated Price: £5+
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Namco

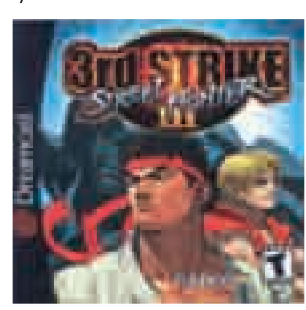
Even today this Dreamcast fighter looks stunning; it's amazing to think it's now nearly seven years old. As well as including an almost identical incarnation of the original arcade game, Namco also saw fit to include a superb Mission mode and a ridiculous array of unlockable extras, ranging from characters to gorgeous art. Nevermind the fact that it can be picked up for around a fiver, this is perhaps the finest 3D Dreamcast fighter you can buy.



Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike

Estimated Price: £15 +
System: Dreamcast
Developer: Capcom

We've just mentioned the best 3D fighter that's available for the Dreamcast, so here, conversely, is the greatest 2D one. Yup, it's yet another chance for us to harp on about the greatness that is *Street Fighter III*. Everything from the arcade original is present and correct, and the animation is to die for. If you can only buy one beat-'em-up for your 128-bit console make sure it's this one. Just make sure you don't pick up *Double Impact* by mistake.



Samurai Shodown

Estimated Price: £20+
System: Neo Geo MVS
Developer: SNK

Forget the ridiculously expensive AES version and hunt down an MVS cart (the ones that were used in the arcades) instead as it will only set you back a fraction of the price. Despite its age, the original *Samurai Shodown* is still regarded as one of the best games in the series – and the finest example of its genre – thanks to its gorgeous visuals, stunning use of sound and a selection of well-balanced characters. The only downside is the high cost of the Super Gun needed to play it.



Virtua Fighter 2

Estimated Price: £2+
System: Saturn
Developer: Sega AM2

While the world impatiently awaits the home release of *Virtua Fighter 5*, why not return to *VF2* and experience the magic all over again? Even by today's standards, Sega's superb fighter looks wonderful and perfectly showcases what the Saturn was capable of with the right development. As with later *Virtua Fighters*, there's an amazing amount of depth to be found – plus it'll take you an age to master every single character so value for money is more or less guaranteed.





SUPER SPRINT [Arcade] Atari, 1986 – Original US Advert


eMag

PERIPHERALS

EACH CONSOLE HAS THOSE MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THEM?

ETHERNET POWERLINE PLUG ADAPTER



Console: Multi
From: Solwise
Price: £40
Available: Now

Electricity is scary, so the thought of running your network connection through the mains in your house is petrifying. We don't pretend to know about electronics, but we can tell you that these Ethernet plug adaptors work beautifully – we just don't know how.

Time spent on the Internet would undoubtedly lead us to the answer, but all that really needs to be known is that any consoles can be linked together, no matter how far apart, as long as there is a mains connection nearby. It's as simple as plugging anything else into a plug socket and is as safe as can be – safer, if you consider the fact that it removes the need to drape ten meters of easy-to-trip-over cable around your house. We have these now, and we are unsure why we didn't have them long, long ago.



GAMEPARK GPX2-F100



From: Gamepark
Price: £124.99
Available: Now

Okay, so it's obviously not going to compete with your PSP, but we were pleasantly surprised with Gamepark's second Linux-based device. The good bits – 3.5-inch QVGA LCD, SD slot, USB 2.0, 64MB flash, 32MB RAM, plays back MPEG, MPEG-4, Dvix, XviD, WMV, MP3 and OGG – are unfortunately let down by the device's somewhat cheap appearance, and the battery life is just a measly five hours. But if you're only paying £125 for kit like this, what do you expect? Really, it's delivering everything you'd imagine and is certainly a huge improvement over the last model.

MAME is available, as are plenty of other quality emulators, and time is sure to show improvements all round. You can't help but feel that this is what Gizmondo should have attempted.



NEUROS MPEG4 RECORDER 2

PLAY IT BACK

Console: PlayStation Portable
From: Pinpoint
Price: £149.99
Available: Now

The VCR has been the victim of many a gag. Despite being famed for its complexity, we have to admit that we've never had any problem using one, and now that this MPEG4 Recorder has appeared, we're more than happy. This will connect up to any analogue source – TV, DVD player, camcorder, cable box – and record anything that's being outputted, as an MPEG-4 digital file, onto your memory card. Once on the card, the file can then be played back on any equipment that supports the file type – that'll be your PSP and iPod then.

It's a handy piece of kit, but at £149.99 it could be considered a little pricy unless you're going to get some serious use out of it. It's a good job we've got one to give away then, really…

WIN!

MPEG4 RECORDER UP FOR GRABS COMPETITION

To be in with a chance of winning, send an answer-smeared email to us at gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk complete with your name, address and the all-important subject 'MPEG People'. Or alternatively, send us a postcard with your name, address and answer to: MPEG People Competition, games™ #46, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ. The closing date for the competition is 10 August 2006. Usual terms and conditions apply.

What does MPEG stand for?

A) Moving Picture Experts Group
B) Multimedia Product Encoding Group
C) Media Program Encoder Group

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

PS2

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £104.99



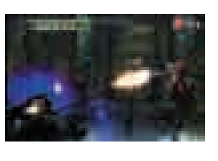
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PS2 is available in both traditional black and 'special' silver.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PS2 GAMES

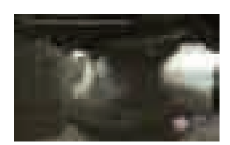
Title	Publisher	Developer
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi
Dragon Quest VIII IMPORT	Sony	Level-5
God Of War	Sony	In-House
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Rockstar North
Guitar Hero IMPORT	RedOctane	Harmonix
Ico	SCEE	In-House
Makai Kingdom	Koei	Nippon Ichi
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	In-House
Prince Of Persia: Sands Of Time	Ubisoft	In-House
Rez	Sega	UGA
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House
SoulCalibur III	Sony	Namco
SSX On Tour	Electronic Arts	In-House
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House
We Love Katamari	Namco	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

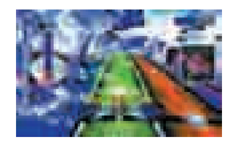
Devil May Cry 3
■ **Until the fourth instalment arrives there are few better ways to test your skills than Dante's latest adventure.**



Shadow Of The Colossus
■ **One of the most beautiful games we've ever seen without a doubt – and easily one of the most impressive.**



Amplitude
■ **With so much challenge and replayability, *Amplitude* is certainly a title that you can rely on to entertain for a good few years.**



PSP

Manufacturer Sony **UK Launch Date** 1 September 2005
Media UMD Disc **Current Price** £179.99



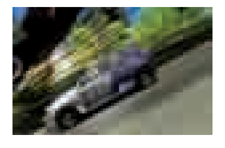
PSP is a beautiful piece of hardware and its games portfolio has strengthened enormously in the months following the European release. Its gorgeous design and capability to play UMD movies has made it a huge success outside the traditional gaming market, too. Although it's very expensive for a handheld, its multimedia features justify the price.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PSP GAMES

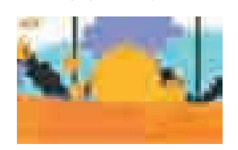
Title	Publisher	Developer
Ape Academy	Sony	In-House
Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Exit	Ubisoft	Taito
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	In-House
Lumines	Ubisoft	Q Entertainment
LocoRoco	Sony	In-House
Mega Man Powered Up	Capcom	In-House
Mercury	Sony	Awesome Studios
Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	In-House
NBA Street Showdown	Electronic Arts	In-House
NFL Street Unleashed	Electronic Arts	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient	D3	Now Production
Pursuit Force	Sony	In-House
Ridge Racer	Sony	Namco
Tokobot	2K Games	Tecmo
Untold Legends	Activision	SOE
Virtua Tennis: World Tour	Sega	Sumo Digital
WipEout Pure	Sony	In-House
WWE Smackdown! Vs RAW 2006	THQ	Yuke's

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

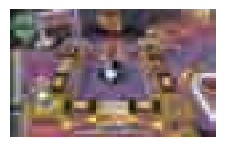
Burnout Legends
■ ***Burnout Legends* serves as a great reminder of why we all fell in love with the *Burnout* series in the first place.**



LocoRoco
■ **It's difficult not to like these colourful blobs, but even if you manage it at first, the sight of them singing will win you over.**



Mercury
■ **An interesting idea that shows that puzzle games needn't rely on blocks and colours alone. Plenty of challenge and appeal.**








EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 13 March 2002
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc **Current Price** £99.99



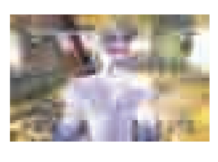
Despite a slow start, Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is 'only a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. Despite the recent release of the Xbox 360, Microsoft will be supporting the console until at least 2007.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion Studios
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box
Fahrenheit	Atari	Quantic Dream
Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	In-House
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House
Psychonauts	Majesco	Double Fine
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	In-House
Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

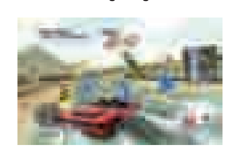
Fable
The choice between the good or evil path is never easy, but *Fable* makes it as entertaining as it could ever be.



Project Zero
If you like scares then there's no need to look any further than this. A genuinely haunting title that'll rattle those nerves.



OutRun 2
Straight out of the arcade and into out hearts, *OutRun 2* still manages to hit us with waves of glee whenever we see it running. Gorgeous.



XBOX 360

Manufacturer Microsoft **UK Launch Date** 2 December 2005
Media 4.5-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £279.99



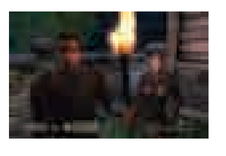
Xbox 360 hasn't been around for long, but has already made a huge impact on the industry and become the fastest-selling console in UK history, despite that enormous price tag. Although we can't help feeling that the best is still to come, Xbox 360's myriad Live functions and decent selection of first-wave titles make it worth sampling right now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX 360 GAMES

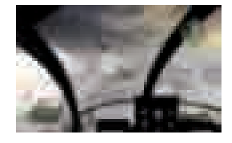
Title	Publisher	Developer
Amped 3	2K Sports	In-House
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
Blazing Angels: Squadrons Of WWII	Ubisoft	In-House
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion
Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Infinity Ward
Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	Monolith
Dead Or Alive 4	Microsoft	Tecmo
Rockstar Games Presents Table Tennis	Rockstar	In-House
Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	In-House
Geometry Wars 2	Live Arcade	Bizarre Creations
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	In-House
Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	Rare
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Legend	Eidos	Crystal Dynamics
Marble Blast Ultra	Live Arcade	Garage Games Inc
NBA 2K6	2K Sports	In-House
Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	IO Interactive
Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
Quake 4	Activision	id Software
Ridge Racer 6	Electronic Arts	Namco
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Bethesda

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
There really is no better way to lose a couple of hundred hours of your life than with this mammoth title.



Battlefield 2: Modern Combat
As long as you have a few friends, *Battlefield 2* will keep you awake and shouting orders at them.



Rockstar Presents Table Tennis
It may not be the most popular sport in the UK, but that doesn't stop this title being superb on Live. Jesper is a bit cheap though.

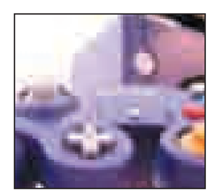


ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 3 May 2002
Media 3-inch Optical Disc **Current Price** £79.99



Though GameCube seems destined to struggle up against the other consoles, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth taking a look at. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

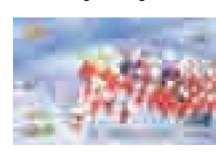
TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House
Alien Hominid	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth
Chibi-Robo	Nintendo	Skip
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	Silicon Knights
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House
killer7	Capcom	In-House
The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House
SoulCalibur II	Namco	In-House
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House

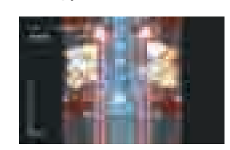
WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Resident Evil 4
A few changes to the *Resi* system means this offering is a little different to the rest – this happens to be a very good thing.

Pikmin 2
We can't tell you how much we want some Pikmin of our own. We'd get them to fetch all sorts of things. Great game.



Ikaruga
How are you meant to avoid all of those bullets? Well, with practise, dear friends, lots and lots of lovely practise.



DS

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 11 March 2005
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £89.99



Chances are, you'll either already be completely in love with Nintendo's newest handheld or you'll have hated it from the start. DS has dismissed misconceptions about it being nothing more than a gimmick by giving us a number of excellent games over the past year, and its affordability and accessibility have given it a sizeable advantage over PSP.

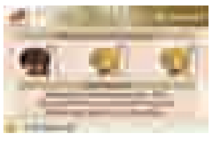
TWENTY MUST-HAVE DS GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars: Dual Strike	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems
Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	In-House
Another Code	Nintendo	Jinx
Daigasso! Band Brothers	Nintendo	In-House
Kirby: Power Paintbrush	Nintendo	HAL Labs
Lost In Blue	Konami	In-House
Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time	Nintendo	In-House
Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	In-House
Meteos	Nintendo	Q Entertainment
Metroid Prime Pinball	Nintendo	Fuse Games
Nintendogs	Nintendo	In-House
Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan!	Nintendo	Inis
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Nintendo	Capcom
Sonic Rush	Sega	In-House
Tony Hawk's American Sk8land	Activision	Vicarious Visions
Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Atlus	Atlus
Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble	Capcom	Clover
WarioWare Touched!	Nintendo	In-House
Yoshi Touch And Go	Nintendo	In-House
Zoo Keeper	Ignition Entertainment	Success

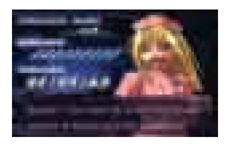
WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

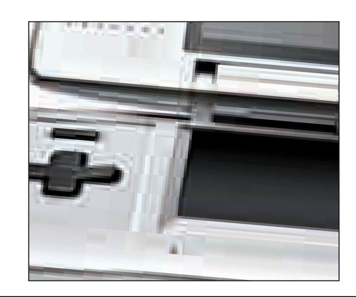
Mario & Luigi: Partners In Time
Although simple, this RPG/platformer shows exactly what greatness DS is capable of.

Nintendogs
Not really a game, it's true, but if you have spare time and affection, then why not take home a virtual puppy?



Trauma Center: Under The Knife
For every game that forces the stylus into play, there's one that does things just right. *Under The Knife* does what DS does best – fun.





EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, Game Boy Advance is a cheap, effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games can be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours, while the even more diminutive Micro is also out to buy now.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GBA GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town

Creating and running a farm may sound boring, but it's really not. Just trust us. Please.



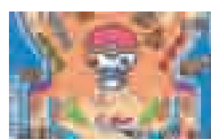
Mario Golf: Advance Tour

Unlike many other Mario sports titles, *Mario Golf* has provided a great experience every time. This version is no exception.



Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire

There's more to Pokémon than just 'catching them all' and *Pokémon Pinball* shows this superbly.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics and other special effects.

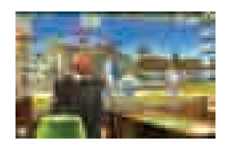
TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	Digital Illusions
City Of Heroes	NCsoft	Cryptic Studios
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2006	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
GTR – FIA GT Racing Game	Atari	SimBin Development
Guild Wars	NCSoft	ArenaNet
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	In-House
The Movies	Activision	Lionhead Studios
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004: Editor's Choice Edition	Atari	Digital Extremes
World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Blizzard

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

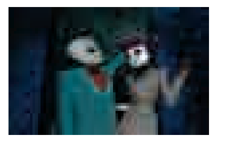
The Movies

This allowed us to create the masterpiece *Monkey Verses Robot In The Rain*. It simply has to be a great game.



Grim Fandango

It may be a little old now, but *Grim Fandango* is still one of the funniest and cleverest point-n-click adventures out there.



Sid Meier's Pirates!

We all want to be pirates, and Sid Meier's title allows you to get as close as you can without losing an eye or a leg.

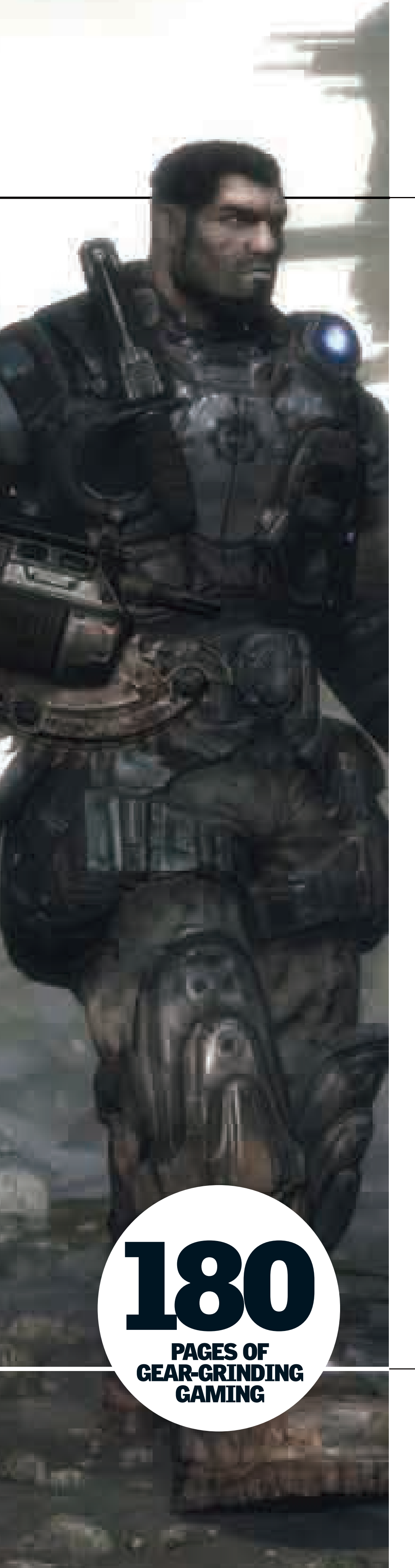



eMag



games™ goes head to head with Epic's mind-blowing shooter…

GEARS OF WAR



NEXT MONTH

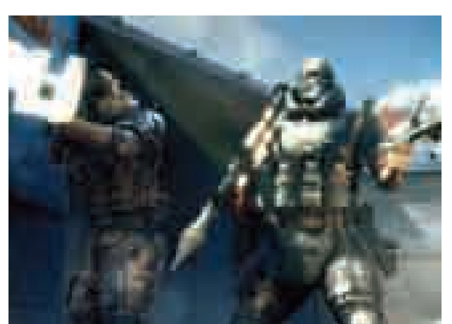


The Meier-inspired *CivCity: Rome* gets the games™ treatment.

MORE… REVIEWS

That familiar summer drought is very much upon us, dear reader, but have no fear, you can expect the same high quality, uncompromising review section that has defined **games™** over the years. *Test Drive Unlimited*, *Def Jam Fight For New York* and *CivCity: Rome* will be under next month's microscope for your delectation.

"ONCE DELAYED AND NOW UPON US. IS THIS THE FUTURE OF RACING GAMES?"



EA's new product is looking good – find out why next month.

MORE… PREVIEWS

Next month **games™** will be taking an enticing look at Electronic Arts' brand new IP, *Army Of Two*, along with updates on all of the happenings in the world of Nintendo Wii, PlayStation3, Xbox 360 and PC. Expect to be seeing an in-depth examination of Microsoft's *Gears Of War*, a further look at *Metroid Prime 3* and a dissection of *Tekken 6*.

"METROID PRIME: CORRUPTION COULD WELL BE WII'S KILLER APP"



Never mind the Boll-ocks. We reveal the truth about the notorious Uwe Boll.

MORE… FEATURES

The **games™** bible is on vacation for the summer, so you'll just have to make do with an interview with one of Hollywood's leading videogame/ movie directors… yes, it's the story of when **games™** met the legend that is Uwe Boll. We know you can't wait. As if that wasn't enough, the usual industry comment and retro love will be present and correct too.

ON SALE 10 AUG 06

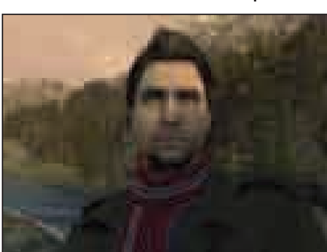
CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…



Will the graphical prowess of PS3 have a place for low-tech fun like *Guitar Hero*? God, we hope so.



Alan Wake is just one of several feverishly anticipated Xbox 360 games. Sony, take note.

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, BH2 6EZ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

I FIND IT IRONIC that Sony is promoting PlayStation3 as the most graphically powerful next-gen console when the most innovative games it currently offers include *SingStar*, *Buzz!* and the sublime *Guitar Hero*. Sony's E3 showing makes me think that this contradiction hasn't passed it by either, as copycat efforts from Xbox Live, and the Wii remote certainly testify. In the company's attempts to fulfil its goal of an all-singing, all-dancing machine it has predictably created a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none.

I'm not saying that PS3 won't be enjoyable, but with such a ridiculous price tag surely we deserve better than 'a game we played two years ago with slightly better graphics'. This is why I feel that Nintendo has the right idea producing games that genuinely appeal to gamers and non-gamers alike. Nintendo's ethos seems to be to appeal to a broader audience with products they will enjoy. With PS2, Sony advertised it as a cool must-have and this undoubtedly worked and will have sold many millions of machines outside of the gamer demographic, but how many of those machines are now sitting idly under TVs or gathering dust in a cupboard after the non-gaming purchaser realised they don't actually like videogames or they were just too complicated for them to get 'in to'?

Daniel Williams

games™: It's true that Sony's E3 showing was viewed as fairly underwhelming, but it is very easy to become too critical. Xbox 360 suffered a lot of derision around its release, but people now seem to be warming to it nicely. The motion-sensitive controller seems a cynical business move, but the accusation of ripping off Xbox Live is a little harsh. Sony was bound to push for the online market at some point – Microsoft didn't invent Internet gaming – and, being the first, Xbox Live was obviously going to be the template. There is a feeling of 'same games but prettier' about PS3, but the same is true of Xbox 360. Neither console will make gaming any more democratic, but that's where Nintendo Wii comes in. For us, the sticking point is still the price. It may be a Blu-Ray player too, but until the format actually takes over DVD it is a redundant feature and small justification for a £425 price tag.

I'VE NOT WRITTEN to a games mag for some time, but I've decided to submit some of my gaming smarts to your fine readers of this excellent magazine about a topic I've recently noticed – PlayStation3.

As E3 rolled into town, I noticed there wasn't much love for PS3. It seems to me that it's going to be to Sony what the Dreamcast was to Sega. Don't get me wrong – I love my Dreamcast, but there seems to be so much troubling PS3. Also, the price, which I've been told is $799, is a touch expensive. Xbox 360 has upcoming titles like *Dead Rising*, *Alan Wake* and *Halo 3*, as well as its already hugely successful Live service. Nintendo's new console has games like *Twilight Princess* and *Mario Galaxy*, plus an unimaginably large back catalogue to download.

I'm amazed at how many of my Xbox-hating friends are trading in PS2s for 360s – many of whom said hell would freeze over before that happened. I'd love to see PS3 do

"I'M NOT SAYING **PS3** WON'T BE **ENJOYABLE**, BUT **IN SONY'S ATTEMPTS** TO FULFIL ITS **GOAL** OF AN **ALL-SINGING, ALL-DANCING** MACHINE, IT HAS PREDICTABLY CREATED A **JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES** AND A **MASTER OF NONE**"





Nintendo's awesome back catalogue could provide a great reason to buy the reasonably priced Wii.



With updates to the *Zelda*, *Metroid* and *Mario* franchises promised, Wii looks more and more attractive every day.

well, but I really see this as the beginning of the end for the PlayStation era. PS3 has improved graphics and design capabilities, but without innovation graphics don't mean anything. Compared to Xbox 360s USB connectivity and Nintendo Wii's ballsy originality, I just don't see wireless controllers and a new disc format swaying the masses.
Danny Smith

games™: The aftermath of E3 has left us with a slew of letters regarding the waning excitement surrounding PS3. An enormous part of this is the timing. Most people simply don't want to wait until November to join the next gen, and, with Sony and Microsoft ploughing essentially the same furrow, 360 started to seem like a good idea. The true potential of PS3 won't be unlocked as easily as that of Xbox 360, so it may be some time before the difference between the two consoles becomes truly apparent. Put another way: you could buy an Xbox 360 and a Wii for the same price as a solitary PlayStation3. Surely only the hardiest Sony devotees could resist such a tempting proposition.

I WANT TO write about how much I love your mag. It's awesome. I have ordered the magazine and I love to read the news section. It's amazing. It fills me with joy when the post comes through the door and my magazine is there, so please put me in your magazine and say how much I am devoted to **games™**, because I am. Good luck on issue 45 and best of luck from my friends as well.
Richard

PS: I'm 13 and your magazine rules! Write back and say I'll be in 45. Please, please, please, I want it so much. Thanks for your time.

games™: Richard, you're making us blush, but sincere thanks from the whole team for your kind words. We rarely receive a letter that isn't pointing out a spelling mistake on page 57 or some other tiny detail, so it's nice to hear from such a young fan. May we never let you down, lest our heads fall off and our partners leave us. We like to think we're 'down with the kids', and you've just proved it.
Sir, we thank you.

YOU SHOULD SEE the damage the stack of 44 issues of **games™** is doing to my shelf, it's starting to bend under the pressure now. A few of my friends and I have bets on how many issues it'll take to break it. I say 60… I guess it'll be quite a while before we find out.

Before E3, I was under the impression that the 'Wiimote' would basically work

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry. Or not…

games™ would like to apologise to reader Graham Mansell for our cutting response in issue 44 regarding his letter about Jack Thompson. The meaning in his original letter was mistakenly changed from "agreed" to "would agree", thus changing his meaning and as such our response. We are not too big to admit a mistake, of which this is the only one. Ever. Sort of.

Text Life

- Enough PS3 already.
g™: Okay, okay… for now. The release of the most powerful console in history is a big deal, you know.

- 'Wii' sounds like 'wee'.
g™: No comment. We've got in plenty of trouble over such puerile comments. Shame on you.

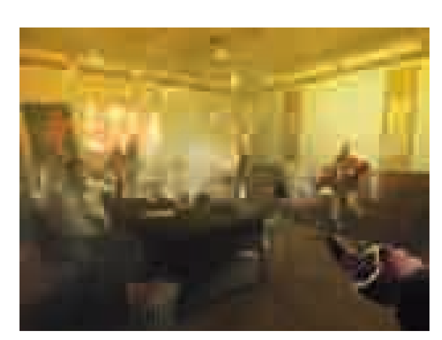
- What's your favourite *Guitar Hero* tune?
g™: Each to their own, but *More Than A Feeling* floats this particular boat. Love those harmonies.

- No banana pad for PS3. Bah!
g™: Modelling console peripherals on fruit will never be a good idea. Staple a banana to the back of it and shut your eyes. Same thing.

- Richard Garriott is a legend.
g™: Invented MMORPGs, builds the best haunted houses ever and rides a horse like a cowboy. Yeah, just a bit.

- *Dirge Of Cerberus*. Worst title ever?
g™: It's certainly right up there, and says nothing about the game, so it's unnecessary to boot.

- Any jobs going?
g™: Well, with such an impressive application how can we say no? Welcome to the company, you start Monday. White. Two sugars.



Too jerky, or not too jerky? Well, maybe a little, but we're sure Nintendo will sort it out.



Nintendo's Wiimote is a source of much apprehension, but it could be great.

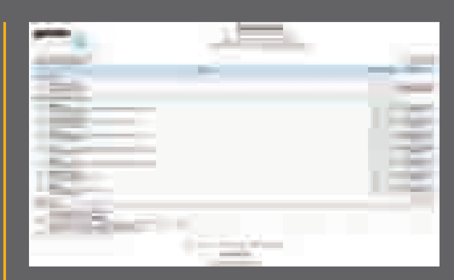
like a lightgun, but I've been reading about *Red Steel* and *Metroid* being too sensitive. I was wondering how a lightgun game could be too sensitive. How could looking at the screen, pointing and pulling the trigger be too sensitive? Please don't tell me that the Wiimote acts like an analogue stick and just measures how far you aim up as opposed to the exact point you're aiming at.
Grindie

games™: Congratulations on your shelving dilemma. We're always happy to hear from loyal fans and would be most grateful if you stick with us until you hit 60 copies and the damn thing finally breaks. When it does, we suggest keeping the issues in boxes – there's less chance of disaster that way.

As for the Wiimote, it's still too early to pass any definite judgement. E3 is a valuable source for developers and publishers to receive feedback on their products, and with the Wii launch still some way off it's almost certain that any sensitivity niggles will be addressed by Nintendo. The Wiimote doesn't work like a lightgun – you flick the controller to make the cursor move, rather than the cursor corresponding exactly with where you point it. When we got a hands-on at E3 we couldn't help but feel that it wasn't so much sensitive as it was unique. People didn't pick it up straight away, and were perhaps a little too zealous in blaming the remote. With any luck, a few tweaks by Nintendo and some serious practice will eliminate all such concerns.

I READ YOUR article on the Xbox Live achievement system recently and thought it summed it all up perfectly. I have a problem with it, however, I somehow managed to reach a score that can only be described as the ultimate nerd's score of 1,337. French-Canadians can keep their 25,000 points. I now have no desire to unlock any more points, as I already feel special. Keep up the good work.
Andy Scott

games™: As well you should, Andy. You are, after all, a special person. We love Xbox Live and all the wonderful gaming experiences that come with it, but a major point made in the article is that we should try not to get too caught up in the competition of points tables. There's a lot of fun to be had that has nothing to do with unlocking points, so yes, French-Canadians – or anyone else for that matter – can keep their 25,000 points. If it means playing bad games, we'd rather not have them. No matter how much time you devote to it, there'll always be someone who'll do that little bit more. Get to a pub and rejoice in the fact that you aren't slaving through *King Kong* just to solidify your league position.



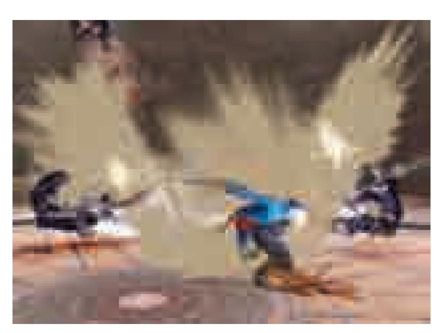
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FROM THE FORUM

WHAT'S IN A NAME?



The PC is seldom blessed with quality hack-n-slash games. They've had to make do with *Golden Axe*…



…until *Devil May Cry 3*, that is. We would have reviewed the PC version if we could have, but thems the breaks.

I'M SURPRISED YOU chose to review *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition* on PS2 instead of its brand-new format, PC. I mean, since it's more or less the same game you played on PS2 last year, I thought you'd jump at the opportunity to see whether the experience translates well to the higher resolutions of a computer monitor. There are also some very real concerns about the PC version, such as how good is gamepad support, or, for those who don't have one, how do the controls fare on keyboard and mouse? You could've helped introduce PC gamers to a whole new genre by reviewing the PC version of this, but instead, lazy sods that you are, you chose to lounge it on your sofas and fiddle with your dual shocks. May I point out that there haven't been any hack-n-slash actioners on PC since the (multi-platform) *Lord Of The Rings* games, and, before that, *Severance: Blade Of Darkness*, and, before that, *Golden* sodding *Axe*?
M Papadopoulos

games™: Apologies for causing you concern. We accept that we can appear console biased, and we heartily agree that the arrival of *DMC3* on PC is an important event. Unfortunately, we don't have unlimited choice in terms of what we review, and it's never been our policy to review the same game on more than one format – plus, we can only review what we receive from the publisher to begin with. The teams that make and market games want them to sell in large numbers, and so they often submit the format with the highest sales potential for review. Of course, this means that Xbox and PlayStation2 will more often than not be the preferred option, but we always try to make the review as broad as possible to compensate. The agony of being a multi-format magazine is trying to please everyone all the time, and rest assured had we reviewed the PC version we would likely have received a letter of complaint from a hacked-off PlayStation2 owner – 'lazy sods' we may be, but we do try.

"I **MANAGED TO REACH** A SCORE THAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS **THE ULTIMATE NERD'S SCORE** OF **1,337**. FRENCH-CANADIANS **CAN KEEP** THEIR **25,000 POINTS**. I HAVE **NO DESIRE TO UNLOCK** ANY **MORE POINTS** AS **I ALREADY FEEL SPECIAL**"

Volstar
This 'new' name doesn't make a jot of difference in my mind. I'm big enough and burley enough (in a ten stone, 5'8" way) to go into my local Game shop and order one. Sure it's different (the 'wee' jokes are spreading across the Internet faster than I can say 'Revolution'), but it certainly won't stop me buying one. I'm sure it'll provide a barrel of laughs for certain parts of the gaming community though…

Last Exile
I'll buy one eventually, but maybe online. The name is just so poor. I don't think that Nintendo realised it's meaning in everyday use. "I want a Wii". Good grief! It really should have stuck with the Revolution.

Gemini-Phoenix
Not content with already being the laughing stock for its "Revolutionary" TV remote-style controller, Nintendo now goes one step further by getting rid of a name that we have all pretty much already accepted, and replaced it with the stupidest name ever. Come on, even the Dolphin's renaming to the GameCube is understandable, given that it is indeed 'cube' shaped and plays 'games'.

Mapster
Dreamcast sounded silly in the beginning, but it's my favourite console name. Think out of the box, I like it.

Pip
Based on the name, so far it's got people talking and will probably bring it to the public's attention even more. Even if people/the press slag it off, there's no such thing as bad publicity. It does seem strange to announce the official name after having used the Revolution tag for so long, when the public has come to accept this name. But hey, that's Nintendo!

Cretin
The problem here is that Nintendo has gone for something symbolic – it's pronounced 'we', clearly indicating that Nintendo wants the name to enhance its ideal of introducing gaming to everybody. However, I don't see how such ideals can be of benefit. More people are likely to be put off a console by a crappy name than enticed to buy it because of a symbolic one. Revolution sounded good and was kind of symbolic (in a more sensible way than Wii), so why the hell Nintendo changed it I have no idea. How are people expected to take the company seriously?